OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER™

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GAMING STARTED HERE... ODYSSEY

INSIDE THE DRAGON'S TRAP

RYUICHI NISHIZAWA REVISITS HIS EPIC WONDER BOY GAME

DIDDY KONG RACING

RARE ON BEATING MARIO KART AT ITS OWN GAME

CHOCKS AWAY CHAPS!

1942

HOW CAPCOM TOOK THE SHOOT-'EM-UP GENRE IN A BRAVE NEW DIRECTION

25 ESSENTIAL XBOX GAMES

THE BEST HITS FOR MICROSOFT'S FIRST CONSOLE. HOW MANY DID YOU PLAY?

DIG DUG

WE REVISIT NAMCO'S POPULAR ARCADE GAME AND ITS MANY CONVERSIONS

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- GAMESTAR
- FIRE EMBLEM
- SHARK! SHARK!
- AMSTRAD CPC 464
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- MAGIC: THE GATHERING

TAKING FLIGHT THIS ISSUE:

DAVID DARLING ON CODEMASTERS

THE CO-OWNER LOOKS BACK AT A CAREER IN GAMES THAT WAS ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT

SUPERPOWERED VIDEOGAMES

MARVEL'S JOURNEY FROM CLASSIC COMICS TO HOME SYSTEMS AND COMPUTERS

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THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE MARVEL VIDEOGAME



DARRAN JONES

I'm going with *The Amazing Spider-Man Vs The Kingpin* on Mega-CD, as this was the first time, for me, that a videogame captured the essense of Marvel's comics.

Expertise:
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine

Currently playing:
Banjo-Kazooie

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



NICK THORPE

Can I go with *Marvel Vs. Capcom 2*? I keep a copy of it on my desk!

Expertise:
Owning six Master Systems (I sold one)

Currently playing:
Steins; Gate

Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog



PAUL DRURY

I'm going old school and saying Scott Adams' *The Hulk*. I grew up with his text adventures and I remember the joy of working out you needed to bite your lip to escape that first room…

Expertise:
Scrolling on the BBC Micro

Currently playing:
Batman: Arkham Knight

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



JONATHAN WELLS

Despite my love of all things Marvel I haven't played many of the early games, I did, however, love *Lego Marvel Super Heroes*.

Expertise:
Tackling dirty nappies and retro spreads

Currently playing:
The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

Favourite game of all time:
Day Of The Tentacle



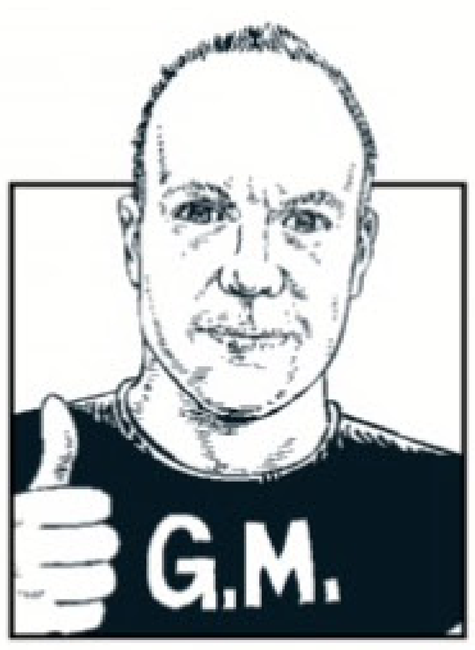
DAVID CROOKES

Howard The Duck. Quakers? Well, at least it was marginally better than the film.

Expertise:
Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, Dizzy, and PlayStation (but is it retro? Debate!)

Currently playing:
Grim Fandango

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



GRAEME MASON

Not retro I'm afraid, but I am having great fun currently playing *Lego Marvel Super Heroes* with my son.

Expertise:
Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver

Currently playing:
Lego Marvel Superheroes

Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 4



PAUL DAVIES

Marvel Vs. Capcom. That period of time was when Capcom was at it's most imaginative and go-getting. Its depictions of much-loved heroes were awesome, plus we got super-powered versions of Ryu and Mega Man.

Expertise:
Repeatedly banging my head against a brick wall

Currently playing:
Destiny

Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts

LOADING...



It's a well-known fact in the office that I'm no fan of *Dig Dug*. I've always found its gameplay to be too basic, and despise the fact that *Mr Do*, a far superior game, is ignored in favour of it. Knowing this fact, the team takes delight in putting mentions of *Dig Dug* in the mag when they can, safe in the knowledge that my dislike of the game won't be more powerful than the option to share cool information about it with readers.

Several times this month I was asked: "Why are you putting *Dig Dug* forward as a cover option if you dislike it so much?" The answer is obvious: **Retro Gamer** isn't my magazine, and it's certainly not a magazine to simply indulge my own personal interests. If it was, it'd be filled with Amstrad, *Strider* and shmups and nothing else. *Dig Dug* is a great game, so I'd be doing the magazine and its readers a disservice if it wasn't put forward.

As it happened, *Dig Dug* lost out to another arcade classic, but that doesn't mean it's been forgotten, as there's a fascinating feature about it and its many conversions this month. What I'm trying to say is don't write off or ignore the games and systems that don't strike a nostalgic chord with your youth. You might find out that you're missing out on a slice of brilliance.

Enjoy the magazine!



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>> Load 144 Breathing new life into classic games

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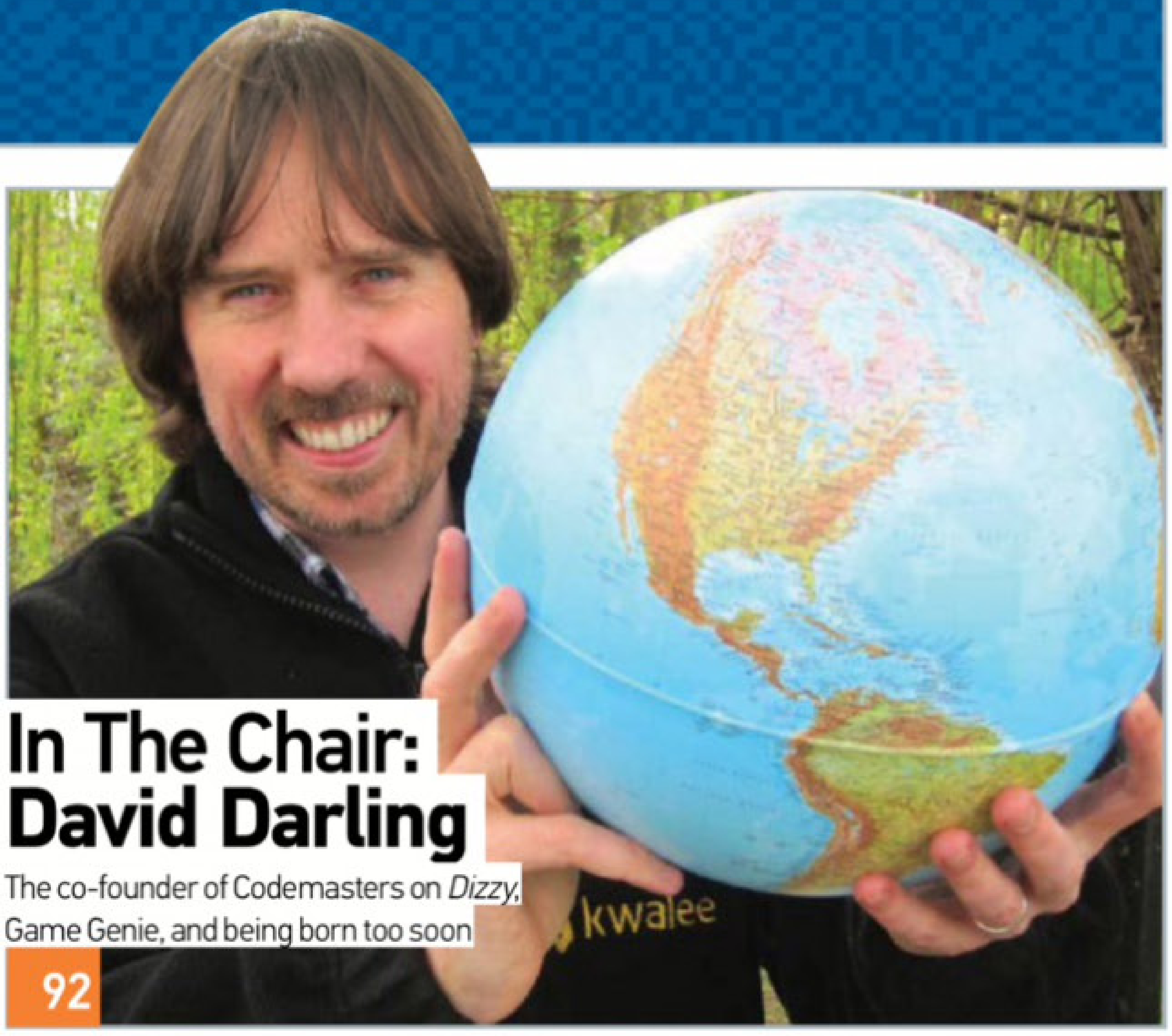






"They are an incredibly fantastic group. They had a final say on the characters"





REVIEWS



ESSENTIALS



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SHENMUE RETURNS THANKS TO YU!

Fans push Yu Suzuki's Kickstarter campaign to $2 million goal within hours

In news that might just have the devil reaching for his thermals, *Shenmue III* was announced as a key part of Sony's E3 conference – an unusual move, given that the game couldn't even be confirmed to be in production due to its status as a Kickstarter project. The high profile gambit quickly paid off though, as the announcement promptly crashed the Kickstarter website and the game became the fastest to hit $1 million on the crowdfunding platform. Less than nine hours after going live, the campaign had hit its lofty $2 million funding goal and was progressing towards a variety of stretch goals – which, as befitting the ambitious heritage of the series, continue above and beyond the $10 million mark. The campaign was yet to finish at the time we went to press.

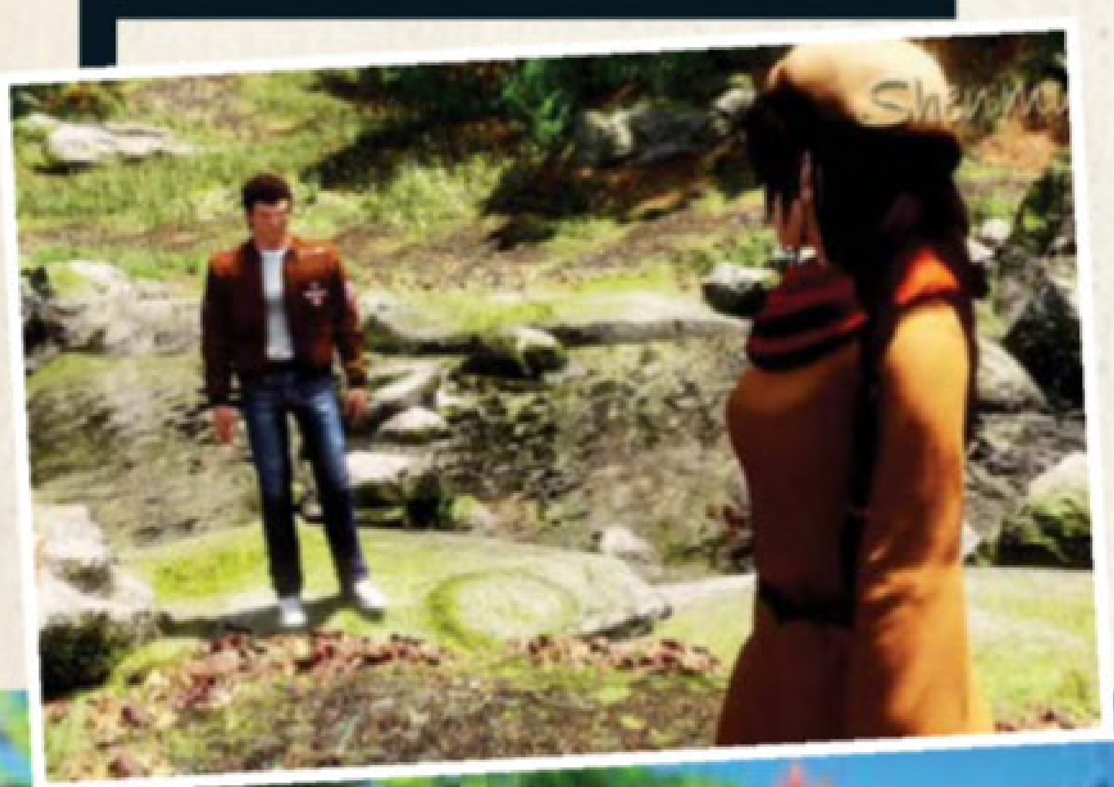
Many gamers, including the **Retro Gamer** team, were convinced that *Shenmue III* would never be made. Yu Suzuki's famously ambitious project began life as a *Virtua Fighter RPG* and evolved considerably over the course of its five year development, moving from Saturn to Dreamcast in the process. *Shenmue* cost $47 million to develop – the most expensive game ever made at that time – and while the game sold over a million copies, it failed to recoup its budget. *Shenmue II* was released on Dreamcast and Xbox, but further sequels were put on hold by Sega as sales failed to live up to expectations, leaving players stuck with an unresolved cliffhanger ending. The series had been in a state of limbo since then – *Shenmue Online* failed to launch after a much-hyped announcement in 2004, and the Japan-only mobile game, *Shenmue City*, barely lasted more than a year past its October 2010 launch. The only indication that Sega still had any interest in the series at all was Ryo Hazuki's appearances in the *Sonic & All-Stars Racing* series.

> **"Shenmue fans have always been vociferous in their desire to see the series continue"**

Shenmue fans have always been vociferous in their desire to see the series continue. On the third of each month, Twitter campaigners have urged Sega to relinquish the *Shenmue* IP to Yu Suzuki so that the series might continue, and fans of the series have generally shown their support at every opportunity they



» [PS4] Graphical improvements over the last 14 years have provided a step away from the Dreamcast's visuals.





» [PS4] Ryo Hazuki is back after 14 years stuck in a cave, and preparing to venture into mainland China.

» [PS4] The *Shenmue III* Kickstarter trailer recalls the languid pace of *Shenmue II*'s fourth disc.



» PS4] After two games as an enigma, Shenhua's role in Ryo's quest may finally be uncovered.

have been given. However, the question mark was never over passion, but cash and funding. With *Shenmue* fans finally able to stump up the cash they had always promised, the successful revival of the series is testament to the support of those who haven't given up the dream in over a decade.

Shenmue III is being handled by Yu Suzuki's independent studio, Ys Net, with support from Sony's third-party production unit, and features a variety of key members of the original creative team. Tak Hirai, lead programmer for the original games, is serving as creative director. Masahiro Yoshimoto and Kenji Miyawaki reprise their roles as script writer and lead character designer respectively, with Ryuji Iuchi back as composer and Manabu Takimoto returning to design environments. Ryo's original Japanese voice actor Masaya Matsukaze is also back in the role of the protagonist. New members of the team include Hiroaki Takeuchi, the animation producer best known for his work as co-producer of *The Animatrix*. Interestingly, Sega isn't involved in the new project at all beyond granting the required IP rights, being credited only for copyright of the original games. Ys Net has indicated that any HD re-release of the first two games is out of its hands.

Shenmue III is heading to PlayStation 4 and PC, and has an release date of December 2017. We'll keep you updated on this most unexpected of developments. ★

READERS REACT >> Will you buy Shenmue III?

■ I spent all day half-jesting that I was waiting for its announcement. The moment the music started playing, I damn well nearly jumped out of my seat. **SPACE_TURNIP**

■ I'm not excited as the originals didn't interest me BUT have backed it anyway to encourage this sort of thing! **RETROBOB**

■ I'm really pleased for all the folk who've been praying for the third instalment that it's finally going to happen, much like I was for *Duke Nukem Forever*... **THE_HAWK**

■ Why does it look worse than the Dreamcast one? **DPRINNY**

■ Waited for the girlfriend to leave then immediately spent all the holiday budget on it. Guilin 1986 is the only destination that I'm interested in now. **ROLAN**

■ Third time lucky, maybe they'll make a game this time! **ANTIRIAD2097**

■ Not particularly, the two DC games never really grabbed me and as this strangely isn't coming to Xbox One there is very little chance of me getting it. **THE LAIRD**

■ I finished the second game when I was 12. I am now 25 and this announcement made me burst into tears. **CHURCHY**

■ Very much looking forward to this. I will probably end up buying a PS4 just because of it. **SIRPIGMEAT**

■ I'm more excited about this than the *Final Fantasy VII* HD remake as it's a completely new game! **MATTEUS**

■ Hell yeah I am excited. Honestly, I never thought that a sequel would happen in my lifetime. **DSTE**

■ The paltry goal set by the kickstarter says this is all just a publicity stunt to grab headlines at E3. *I think Shenmue III* is going to disappoint a lot of people. **THE BEANS**

■ I suppose it could be interesting, although hope I don't need to buy a new platform to play it (may be the time to get a PS4 I guess unless it can run on my laptop). **SEPHIROTH81**

ALSO COMING SOON...

Shenmue III wasn't the only big announcement of the month...

FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE

After teasing fans by bringing an HD update of the original game to PlayStation 4, Square Enix has made fanboy dreams come true by announcing a full modern remake of *Final Fantasy VII*, arguably the most beloved entry in the series. The remake was announced during Sony's E3 conference with a lavish CG trailer that perfectly recaptured the cinematic impact of the original game. Key members of the original team including producer, Yoshinori Kitase, director, Tetsuya Nomura and scenario writer, Kazushige Nojima are returning for the new game, which should help to keep it faithful to the game that players fell in love with 18 years ago. Details are thin on the ground right now, with no gameplay shown and even the vaguest hint of a release date nowhere to be found, but we do know that the game will be coming to PlayStation 4.



» [PS4] So far, all we've seen is the back of Cloud's head in a trailer. We're still excited.

RARE REPLAY

While Rare's new game *Sea Of Thieves* is grabbing headlines amongst those concerned with modern titles, we're finding the prospect of *Rare Replay* far more enticing. The compilation of 30 games includes all-time greats from both Rare and Ultimate, including *Jetpac*, *Knight Lore*, *RC Pro-Am*, *Battletoads*, *Banjo-Kazooie*, *Perfect Dark*, *Conker's Bad Fur Day* and *Viva Piñata*. Amongst these, *Battletoads Arcade* is receiving a home release for the very first time. While rights issues naturally prevent the inclusion of games like *Donkey Kong Country* and *GoldenEye 007*, it's still an enormous collection with plenty to get excited about – especially given that it's launching at the bargain price of £19.99. Xbox One owners won't have to wait long to get their hands on the compilation, as it will be released on August 4th. Look out for a review in a future issue of **Retro Gamer**.



» [Xbox One] Finally, you can relive one of gaming's toughest moments on your modern console.



» Come on chaps, this is no time for panto-style 'he's behind you' routines!

JUST THE TONIC

YOOKA-LAYLEE SMASHED ITS FUNDING GOALS BY RAISING OVER £2 MILLION. PLAYTONIC GAMES' CHRIS SUTHERLAND EXPLAINS THIS SPIRITUAL SUCCESSOR TO BANJO-KAZOOIE

Where did the idea for *Yooka-Laylee* originate?
The basis for a spiritual successor to *Banjo* is something that had been kicking around for some time between a few of us, but exactly what form that might take we didn't narrow down until around end of last year. We liked the idea of a cooperating pair of central characters, and so it was really a case of nailing down what animals that we would use for those.

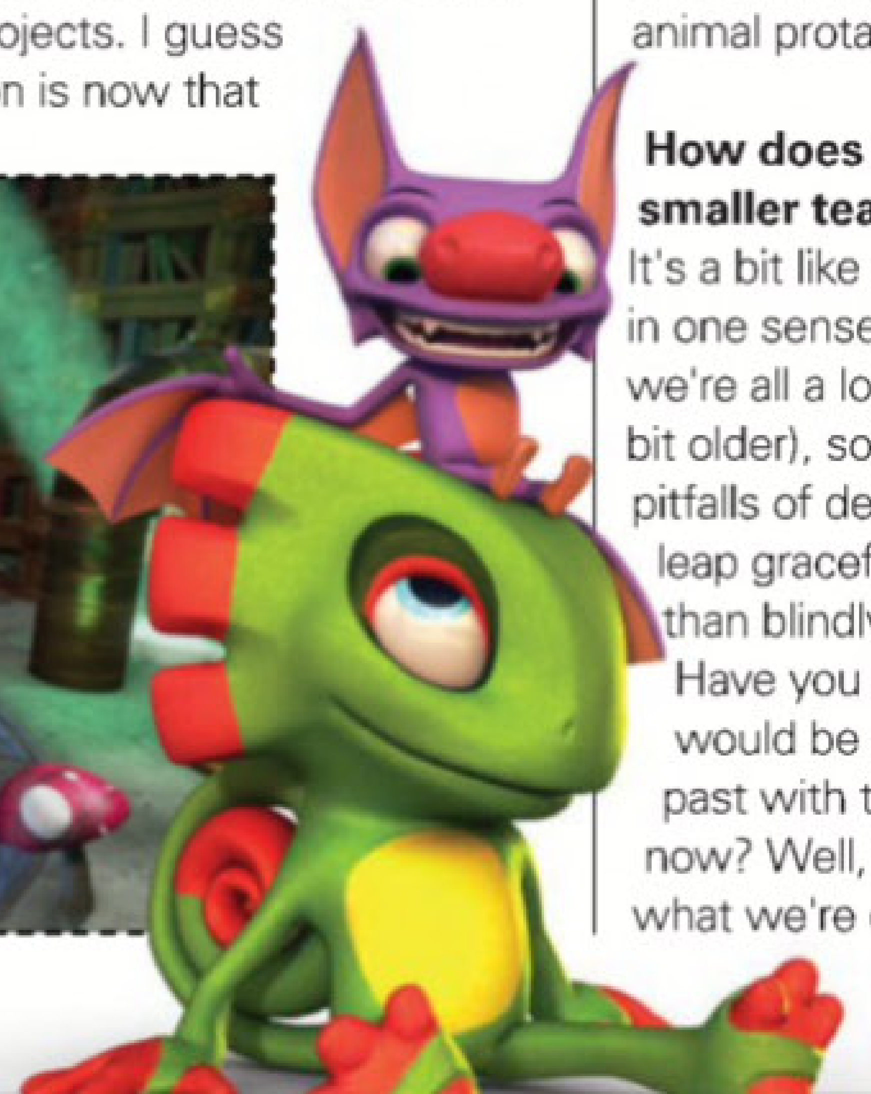
Were you prepared for success from Kickstarter?
We'd done a lot of planning for the Kickstarter; a lot of reading up ourselves, we'd talked to a few industry persons for their advice, and then on the basis of that we set out a campaign plan that had stretch goals that we believed would see us through the campaign of over 40 days and nights. Then when the Kickstarter began, all our plans went out the window as we became funded within 40 minutes and our stretch goals were achieved within a matter of days!

So we thought we were prepared for the Kickstarter, but in fact the opposite turned out to be the case!

Why do you think there hasn't been a new *Banjo* game?
I think that up until recently the amount of interest in a new game in that genre hadn't really been quantified; we knew there were people who wanted this to happen, but we didn't really know the scale of the numbers involved. I believe the level of interest had been increasing over time, in the background, whilst in the meantime Rare was fully-focused on other projects. I guess the question is now that with the level of interest recently generated by the *Yooka-Laylee* Kickstarter, does that make a new *Banjo* game more likely? But that's not a question I can answer, of course!



» Pipework, bookshelves and worryingly-large fungal growths – just where have our intrepid explorers ended up?



How will *Yooka-Laylee* stand apart from your earlier *Banjo* games?
To give just a few examples: we've added expanding worlds to give players more choice in the way they explore the game, we'll have collectibles that feel meaningful to collect, and each world will contain secret retro arcade-style game.

Meanwhile, we've made sure we're keeping all the parts people love about this genre, such as the humour, the cast of characters, and the character abilities (which this time will more closely match the natural skills of the animal protagonists).

How does it feel working on smaller teams again?
It's a bit like stepping back in time in one sense, but on the other hand we're all a lot wiser (as well as a little bit older), so we know many of the pitfalls of development and we can leap gracefully across them rather than blindly stumbling into them. Have you ever wondered what it would be like to go back into your past with the knowledge you have now? Well, I guess that's exactly what we're doing!

» It's been a while since we've seen a lizard platform protagonist. Where *is* Gex, anyway?



Describe the current working atmosphere at Playtonic.
Relaxed intensity. Sounds like one of those oxymoron things, but it's really that having worked with each other in the past, we have a mutual trust in what each other do. You also know how other people on the team will think too, so that makes it easy when exploring new ideas. In fact if that continues we'll soon all be telepathic, which is a scary though for anyone finding themselves in my brain!

What experiences from Rare will you be bringing to *Yooka-Laylee*?
Many of us were at Rare at various periods of its history, both when teams were tiny, up until they became several hundred people creations. So we're able to draw on our experiences of what worked well across a whole bunch of successful projects.

Players will experience humour and fun and fluid play mechanics that will stylistically feel fresh but familiar to those who played our earlier titles. ★

Videogames Hardware Handbook

If you've ever enjoyed reading our in-depth articles on classic consoles and computers you should consider our latest bookazine. Comprising of classic content from past issues of **Retro Gamer** you'll find over 45 systems covered, from the Mega Drive to the Amstrad GX4000 and Commodore Vic-20. There's even space for the likes of the NEC PC98 and Sharp X1, meaning there's something for everyone.

Price: £9.99
From: imagineshop.co.uk

The Story Of The Sinclair ZX Spectrum In Pixels Volume 1

Chris Wilkins' new book is very similar to the latest *A Visual Compendium*. The good news is that it's a lovely tribute to the 8-bit computer with lots of key games covered. The disappointing news is that it lacks the lavish attention that the *Commodore Amiga: A Visual Compendium* received. Admittedly, there's a huge difference between the two projects in terms of funding, but the layouts don't do the games justice. We were impressed with the great interview content, though.

Price: £19.99
From: fusionretrobooks.com

Commodore Amiga: A Visual Compendium

Fans of Commodore's 16-bit computer will be well served by this rather delightful tome from Bitmap Books. It takes the same approach as the earlier Commodore 64 book (another Kickstarter) but greatly refines everything. In addition to the lovely crisp imagery, the most impressive aspect of this compendium is the sheer amount of developers that have been interviewed. Although many are short, virtually every key coder, artist and musician is here, giving the reader a great picture of the Amiga scene. While it offers little content about the chosen games it's a lovely thing to look at, which is what you'd expect from a visual guide.

Price: £29.99-£59.99
From: funstock.co.uk



Sega Arcade Classics

If you're looking for exclusive developer content you're going to be disappointed, as there is none to be found here. Instead, you'll be treated to some fascinating material surrounding Sega's biggest arcade, including *Out Run*, *After Burner* and *Golden Axe*. In addition to detailed write-ups on the original game and any available conversions, all sequels are covered as well, making for an exhaustive, comprehensive guide. The layout is a little cluttered at times, but it's still an enjoyable read.

Price: £16.50
From: amazon.co.uk

The Unofficial Guide To Konami Shoot-'Em-Ups

Another book from Hardcore Gaming 101 and another that focuses on great content over developer interviews. Every Konami blaster is covered here no matter how obscure it is, meaning the likes of *Sky Jaguar*, *Space Manbow* and *Falsion* sit proudly against *Gradius*, *Twinbee* and *Axelay*. Oddly, the book doesn't flow as well as previous books in the series but it's only a minor niggle.

Price: £17
From: amazon.co.uk



ORION REMASTERED

CHRIS KEELING ON THE RETURN OF THE 4X CLASSIC

Perhaps the most surprising announcement of recent times has been the revival of the computer series *Master Of Orion*. Unlike the likes of *Shenmue III* and *Final Fantasy*, *Master Of Orion*'s return wasn't preceded by a large fan campaign nor extensive teasing – but as we were told during an exclusive preview, love for the game is at the heart of this revival.

"This is a passion project for us," explains Chris Keeling, director of product vision at Wargaming. It turns out that Wargaming's CEO Victor Kislyi is a huge fan, and his love of the series was a driving force behind acquiring it from Atari. Interestingly, the new game isn't a sequel to 2003's *Master Of Orion III*. "The original series – that's the icon, that's the legend," Chris says, explaining the decision to reboot the franchise. "We don't want to just try to glom onto that. What we wanted to do is to re-envision the original game for a new generation of players."

The emphasis on modernising the game while staying true to the originals is evident. The 4X gameplay – explore, expand, exploit and exterminate – is largely lifted from the second game in the series, and the turn-based structure remains. The world is derived from the first game, with the original ten races making their return, as well as the GNN news broadcasts that inform players of random events. Proceedings are spiced up with new 3D animation for events. You'll see ships swoop over the surface of newly colonised planets, and see fully animated characters during diplomatic events. Wargaming is promising voice acting from well-known sci-fi figures, but details of who they might be are currently under wraps. The interface has also been updated and made rather more user-friendly, too. "The way we felt about it when we were growing up and playing that game, we want a new audience to be able to feel that, as well as all of the original hardcore 4X players," Chris explains.



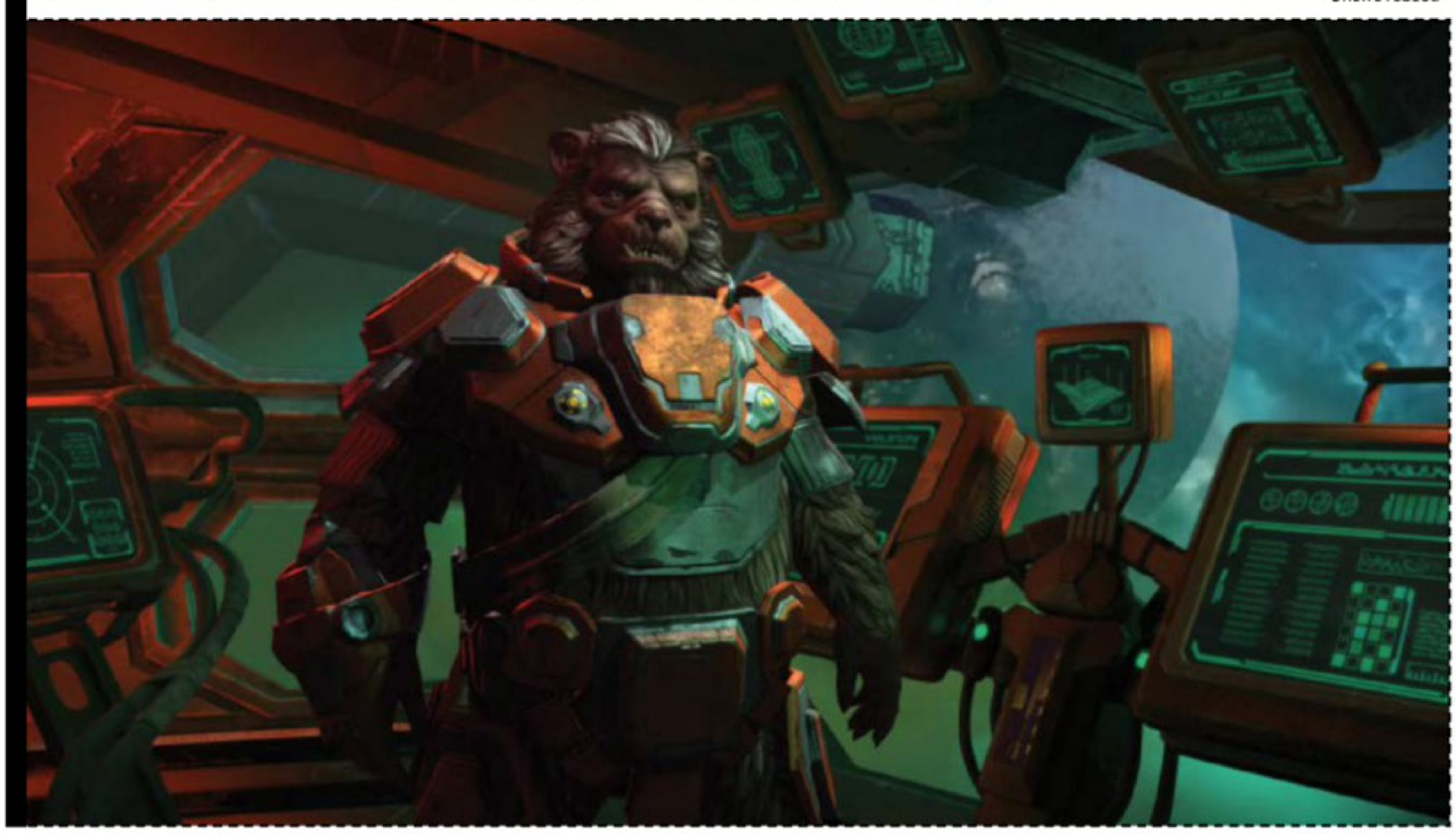
» [PC] *Master Of Orion* has received a presentational overhaul, but the core experience of the originals remains.

Fans are often suspicious of any change of ownership, but it looks like those concerns are being covered. "The only thing that's simplified is the interface and the way information is presented," Chris explains when asked if there's any danger of the game being over-simplified. Also, despite Wargaming's success in the free-to-play sector with games like *World Of Tanks*, *Master Of Orion* will be a traditional release and is intended to be complete from the start. The new game is being developed by NGD Studios in Argentina, but members of the original development team are on board in consulting roles and the original game's composer David Govett is writing the music.

> **"The original series – that's the icon, that's the legend"**
> Chris Keeling

Master Of Orion doesn't have a specific release date or price yet, but it will be launching on Windows first. Look for a review in **Retro Gamer** when it hits the market. *

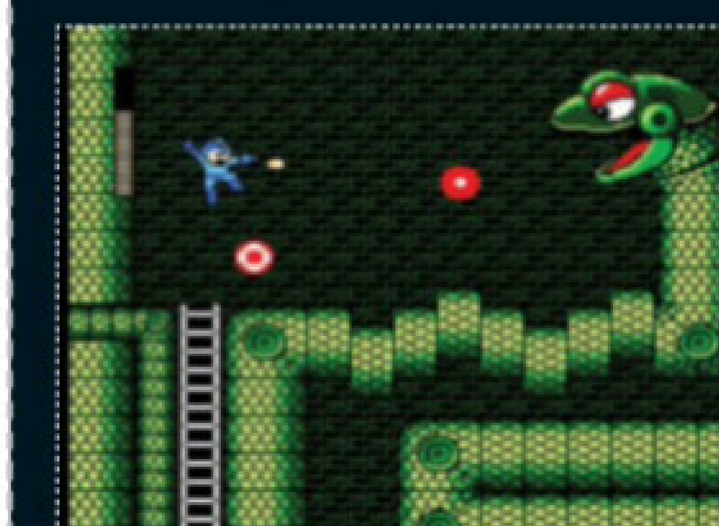
» PC] The original races have had their designs updated for *Master Of Orion*'s reboot.



MEGA LEGACY

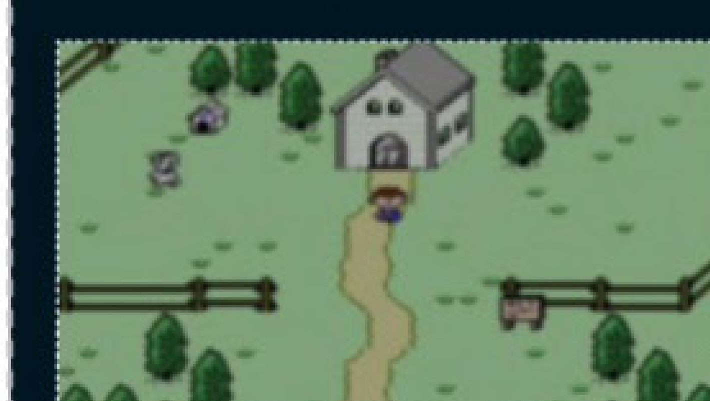
Capcom has announced a new compilation titled *Mega Man: Legacy Collection*, focused on the mascot's six NES outings. As well as faithful reproductions of the original games, developers Digital Eclipse are promising extra material for fans. A brand new challenge mode will showcase remixed gameplay from all six games, with scaling difficulty levels to accommodate both veterans and newcomers, while the museum mode is to offer original concept drawings, artwork and more history.

Mega Man: Legacy Collection is scheduled to launch in downloadable form this summer on PlayStation 4, Xbox One and PC, with a Nintendo 3DS release following in the winter.



BOUND FOR GLORY

Shigesato Itoi's influential NES RPG *Earthbound Beginnings*, better known by its Japanese name, *Mother*, has finally received an official English language release 25 years after the translation was completed. Despite having been fully localised under the name *Earthbound* in 1990, Nintendo originally passed on the release of the game due to low sales expectations and the move towards promoting the SNES. The news that this translation was finally getting a release was a complete shock, as there had previously been no legal way to play it. *Earthbound Beginnings* is out now for the Wii U Virtual Console priced at £6.29.



DISCUSS

Are you excited about the new Final Fantasy VII remake?

Forum
www.retrogamer.net/forum

■ I'm excited to see this. Fans have been screaming for this for years so it's great news, but it's going to be impossible to keep everyone happy. Change too much and people will moan that they've ruined it, don't change enough and people will moan they've been too lazy. **the_hawk**

■ Never played the original, but tasteful updates being available for new platforms are alright by me. Still not sure it is a game for me though. But is it tasteful? **NorthWay**

■ I honestly couldn't be less excited about this if I tried. We are getting far too many re-hashes of old games these days. **The Laird**

■ I think remakes of older games have always been with us and it is in no way a new trend. *FFVII* is one such remake that many people seem to want and have wanted for years and Sony are giving their public what they want, which is certainly no bad thing. Be careful what you wish for, however… **gman72**

Twitter
Twitter.com/@RetroGamer_mag

■ I just hope the remake keeps most of the original story intact. They said the remake might be a little different. **@JaredKFan**

■ I just hope that they don't f**k it up. **@Haruto__**

■ I'm concerned about the extra story, it really doesn't need it. I hope it's set after the main game and not shoehorned in. **@Stormy2k**

■ I got excited before I saw the 'II' after the 'V'. But then I heard that they'd also like to remake *V* and *VI*, so I'm happy again. **@Mighty_JAK**

■ I hope it gets canned because the salty fan tears would sustain me for a thousand years. **@RobThez**

■ Concern = it simply won't have the atmosphere. **@ottocrat**

■ Concern: I've played the original countless times. What does a HD remake really offer me other than better visuals? **@matteusbeus**

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facebook.com/RetroGamerUK

■ Is it needed? No. But the fans have been calling for it and it's a sure way for them to make money. Unfortunately there's a trend of remaking everything instead of putting resources into creating new games. **Sam Smith**

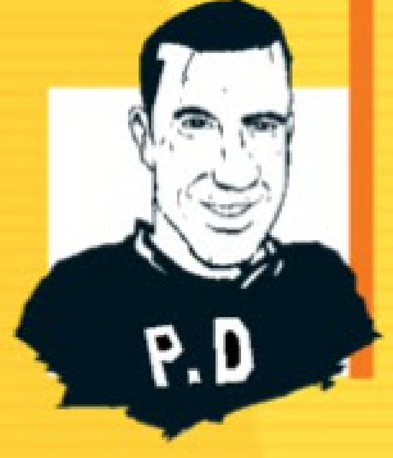
■ A graphical overhaul is badly needed, but mostly everything else should be left alone. Maybe use the remake to flesh out the supporting cast a little more, but otherwise stay as close to the original as possible. **Árni Vikingur**

■ Loved the original but Square should leave it alone. Does this mean that they're going to remake every other *Final Fantasy* game?! **Gazz Brown**

The combat needs to be turn-based with random encounters. No messing with the materia system. Make sure Aerith stays dead and provide a valid explanation why Phoenix Down won't work. **Carl Harrison**

■ I'll give it a whirl when it comes out. It's my favourite game and I don't think it a remake. **Jim Lanning**

retroradar column



Here's my bio... Paul Davies
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.

2-Up

Playing *FIFA* with a friend versus the computer was a new experience for me this month. Yes, there are times when you realise that old habits die hard, though with me it's more about expectations.

I'm a dyed-in-the-wool competitive gamer. Now, I'm not saying I'm any good, in fact I know I'm not. What I mean to say exactly is that videogames have been a broadly competitive experience for me since the very beginning. In the arcade it was about proving to the guy breathing down my neck that I deserved to be shooting at *Space Invaders*, and to leave off my 'next man'. Quite early on with the home computers, we'd all want to get as far as we could into, for example, *Atic Atac*, so if I could survive the longest I'd be allowed to plug away on behalf of the team – basically hogging the keyboard (yes!).

The one game that we played that wasn't (I'm sure intended to be) all that competitive was *Bard's Tale*, for which we'd still argue over the best tactics to murder a room full of kobolds. Anything to do with computer games involved being the best somehow, or at the very least worthy to take part. This might just be me, I may need to see a shrink of some variety, but I'm sure this is how it always was. And still is.

So, buddying up with pals to beat the computer at *FIFA* did seem very weird to me. With football games, as with beat-'em-ups, I expect to be humiliated for an entire afternoon and into the evening, with the odd chance of a fluke victory to celebrate. Having said that, though, I do play a ridiculous number of hours of *Destiny* lately; a game that really puts the emphasis on cooperation and team play – not for player vs. player aspect as with *Call Of Duty* and *Battlefield*, but for player vs. environment facet.

The night before writing this column I found myself outlining a brief series of tactics that would ensure a three-man team in *Destiny* would not end up failing for several hours but instead succeed inside of a minute. It was extremely serious, I have to say. We succeeded in some style as it turned out, making everyone very happy at just turned 12:30am. If we failed, though, I would've been wasting everyone's time and questions would be asked about my suitability to run the show.

So, nothing much has changed since the late Seventies. We are all, I dare say, fiercely competitive scumbags that are raised on a hobby that demands basic competence or please bugger off. Even when we're asked to work together with no trash talking human opponents, we invest spare time into acquiring flashier loot or reaching milestones to assume false modesty about. It's gloriously childish playground stuff really. It makes me extremely happy to be a part of, when I'm not lying awake wondering how not to suck so badly during my next day on duty.

How about you: has your night's sleep ever been disturbed by the recurring memory of a whiffed Dragon Punch or hitting 'pass' instead of 'shoot'? When you're at the till at Tesco, or at the cash machine, do you like to type your pin code with a flourish? Yeah, you do… *



What do you think?

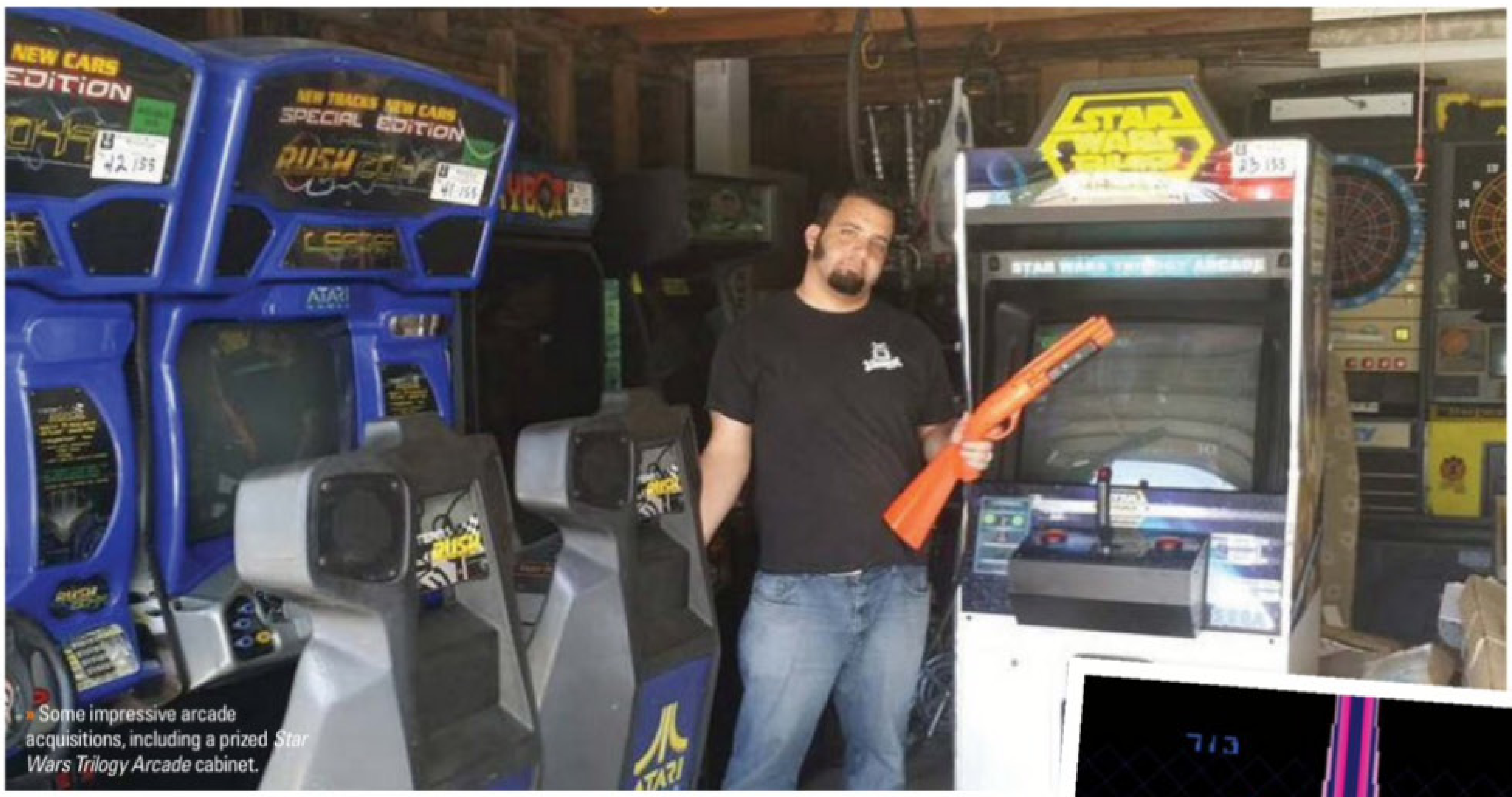
Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK | @RetroGamer_Mag | retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk | www.retrogamer.net/forum

a moment with…

Jesse McClure

As well as starring in TV's Storage Hunters, Jesse McClure is an avid gamer and collector



» Some impressive arcade acquisitions, including a prized *Star Wars Trilogy Arcade* cabinet.

Readers will recognise you from *Storage Hunters*. Were you surprised by how the show has taken off in the UK?
Absolutely! Even when I originally got asked to be on *Storage Hunters*, my first thought was, 'a show about storage auctions? Yeah, that will never work.' Boy was I wrong. Not only am I surprised by its success, but I am also very grateful for the opportunities and the great people across the globe I have met along the way. In the last year, I have been to the United Kingdom seven times now. Such awesome people there, it gets better every single time I go.

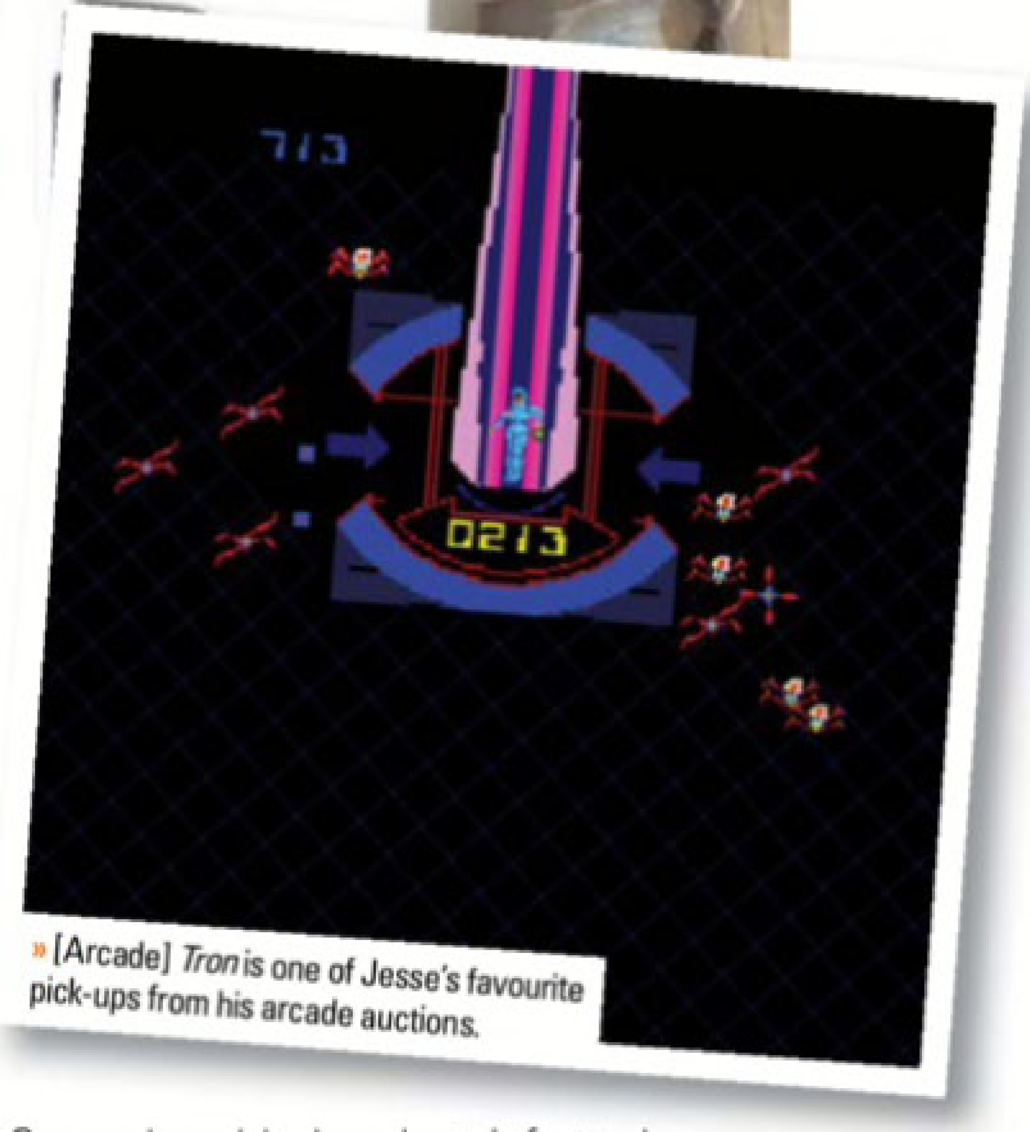
Tell us a little about your history with videogames – what did you play growing up?
My very first system I didn't have to share with my siblings was a Sega Genesis my grandma bought me for my sixth birthday. Oh man, I will never forget that day. Growing up past that, I actually moved backwards with the NES. My top favourites for that were *Tecmo Super Bowl*, *Mike Tyson's Punch Out!!*, *Contra*, and *Battletoads*. As I got older, I really enjoyed playing RPGs. Super Nintendo really had some great Squaresoft titles and man, when *Final Fantasy VII* came out for PlayStation, I was blown away. As I got into high school, I got way into first-person shooters. I was a mega nerd when it came to *Counter-Strike*, to the point I had a semi-pro tournament team I competed with. These days, though, I stick mostly with the arcades. Old school, I love *Galaga*, *Ms. Pac-Man*, or *Donkey Kong*. New school, *Marvel Vs. Capcom*, *Tekken*, or *Bust-A-Move*.



» [NES] Growing up in the USA, it's natural that Jesse would enjoy Nintendo classics like *Punch-Out!!*.

We understand that when you're not on TV, you like to visit arcade auctions. How did you get into that?
I would be incredibly naive to not know that storage auctions would explode after the storage auction show craze. I knew that I would have to evolve into the next untapped market, and when I came across arcade auctions, I found something that I was not only good at, but something I truly enjoyed collecting myself. But man, I will never enjoy having to move those giant machines.





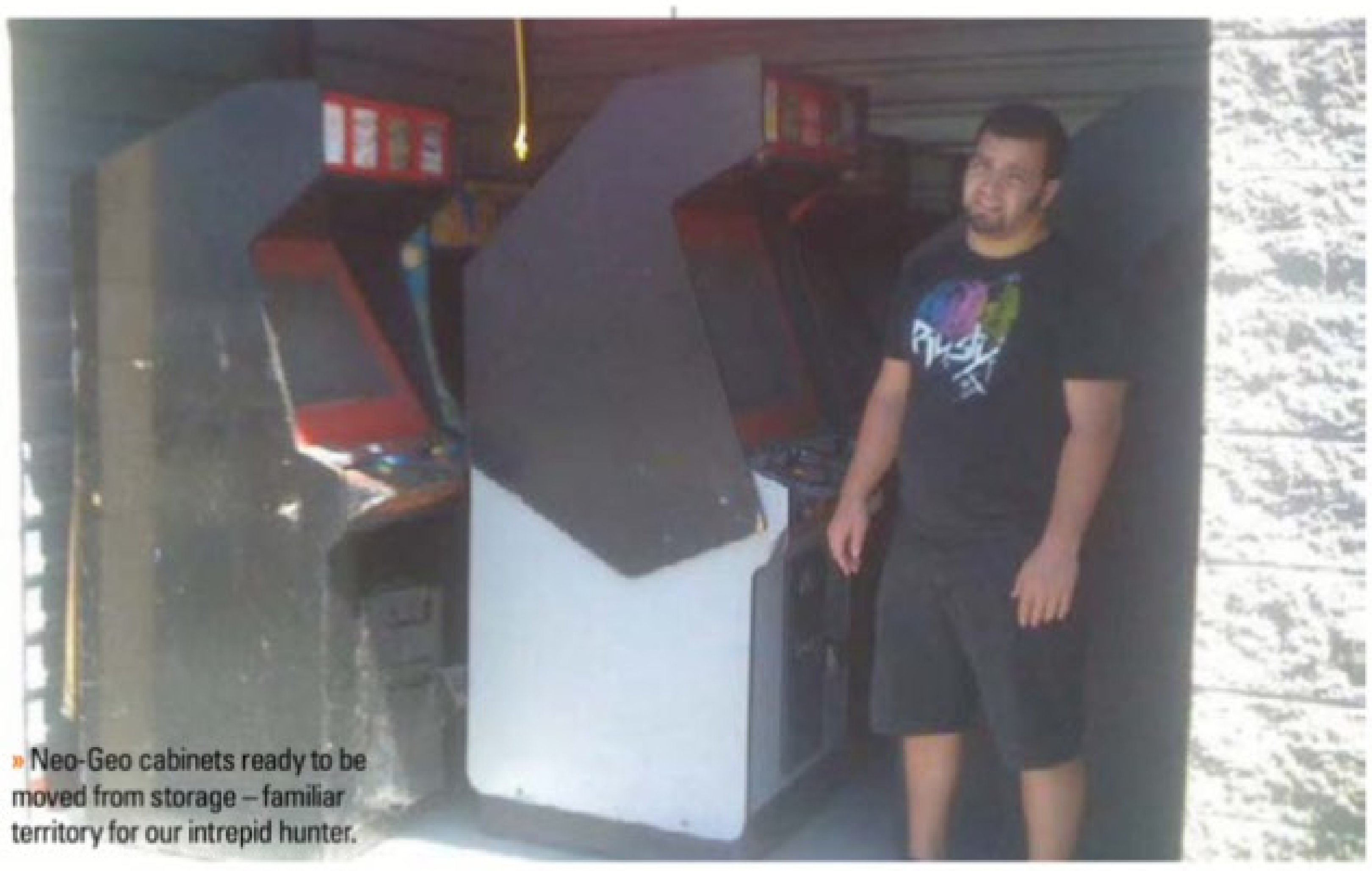
» [Arcade] *Tron* is one of Jesse's favourite pick-ups from his arcade auctions.

What are your best arcade finds?
My best would probably be my very first buy, a *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* pinball from Data East I paid $750 for. Data East made such great stuff back then. Some of my other favourites along the way are *Star Wars Trilogy*, My Neo-Geo six-slot original cabinet, and *Tron*. My best find that I let get away was an original *Michael Jackson's Moonwalker*. Man that game was bad, but I know I will never, ever see that machine again. So sad.

Have you ever encountered any real horror show cabinets, where they were just beyond salvage?
I once picked up 12 machines from a kid who inherited them from his dad. Unfortunately, he didn't inherit the knowledge to not leave arcades out in the rain. Several molded and rat-infested machines later, I was able to scrap a sizable profit, thankfully.

Do you ever get tempted to keep any of the arcade machines you buy when a favourite comes up?
Every. Single. One. No joke. I make such good money doing it, but I lose so much too because I like to hold onto them for as long as possible. I get teary-eyed knowing some of the machines I had to sell. Don't tell anyone I told you that though.

So what is coming up for you in the future and how can we keep up?
I just got done filming the UK version of *Storage Hunters* and now have a couple of new projects in the pipeline. For iOS gamers out there, check out my app *Storage King: Jesse McClure Edition*, and follow me on twitter @StorageHunters or check out www.jessemcclure.co.uk for my latest happenings! Game on, dudes! *



» Neo-Geo cabinets ready to be moved from storage – familiar territory for our intrepid hunter.



STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT BOX SET

"It's got the movies with it. I got in a bidding war but as my collection was nearly complete, I just had to have it."

PAID: £200

GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES

"Not a limited edition but a game I have very many fond memories of. When my eldest was little we used to spend hours taking turns on it. A very addictive game."

PAID: £20

ALIEN HOMINID EUROGAMER EDITION

"I picked this one up for a couple of quid when the Xbox wasn't fashionable. I haven't seen one since, I think it was some sort of competition prize and only 100 were made."

PAID: £2

DEBUG AND DEVELOPMENT CONSOLES

"I got these from a collector who found them in a junk warehouse. You can't play games on them but they've got half-developed stuff on them, games that weren't released."

PAID: £80

OVER THE HEDGE LIMITED EDITION BOX SET

"In the Australian PAL region they seemed to get so many more box sets. This one includes a remote control car and I won it on eBay Australia. Fortunately my sister lives there so I could have it delivered to her."

PAID: £20

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

THAT PIECE YOU CAN'T BE WITHOUT

EX-SHOP XBOX DISPLAY UNIT

■ "Someone was advertising it on eBay and his garage was an Aladdin's cave, but when I collected it he couldn't find the keys to the unit and some tubes were broken, so he let me have it for nothing. I had to drill the lock but the TV is the original one and I have seen these on eBay now for around £500."

PAID: £0

BIO

NAME: Neil Fenton

ESTIMATED VALUE: £5000

FAVOURITE CONSOLE: Microsoft Xbox

FAVOURITE GAME: *Donkey Kong*



Collector's corner

Readers take us through the retro keyhole

This month we have a *Guinness Book Of Gamers* record holder, the man behind the biggest collection of PAL Xbox games in the world. Meet Neil Fenton, from Rainham, Essex, a self-confessed nut when it comes to the Microsoft console. "When the Xbox first came out, I won one in a *Computer And Video Games* magazine competition," he smiles, "and when they phoned me up, I thought they were pulling my leg!" Fortunately for Neil it was no joke and he was soon the proud owner of one of the black and green behemoths.

"I actually had a PlayStation 2 at the time," he admits, "but what really converted me to the Xbox was the online side of gaming. Microsoft had Xbox Live, and it was a big thing, whereas the PS2 didn't really have online. Then my mates starting getting them too and all of a sudden we were playing a lot together online. It was also new, from a new manufacturer in the console field, and I liked the sturdy nature of the controller." The first games Neil tasted were ubiquitous pack-in titles such as *Halo* and *Midtown Madness*. "I wasn't much into them though. We played mainly *Battlefield*, *Ghost Recon* and *Project Gotham Racing*." But when and how did the collecting start? "It started out just seeing games in bargain bins and not resisting them, and before I knew it I had a decent amount of games. I'm a bit of a collecting maniac anyway, and it kinda snowballed from there." The relatively cheap price and low number of releases compared to, for example, the PlayStation 2, also helped in persuading Neil he should go for a full PAL set.

Today, Neil's collection sits inside a bespoke pair of sheds, nestled away at the bottom of his garden. One shed contains a mountain of boxed peripherals and spare consoles while the other houses all of his games, a large clutch of controllers and his personal jewel in the crown, an ex-shop Xbox display unit. "I do like collecting," he admits, "but I force myself to concentrate on the Xbox. I aim to play as many as possible. Although I might give the old *Championship Managers* a miss…."

Thanks to Neil and also Jamie Clarke of Guinness World Records.

BACK TO THE NINETIES



[Dreamcast] *D2* was the first confirmed Dreamcast game. It was also the console's first real stinker.

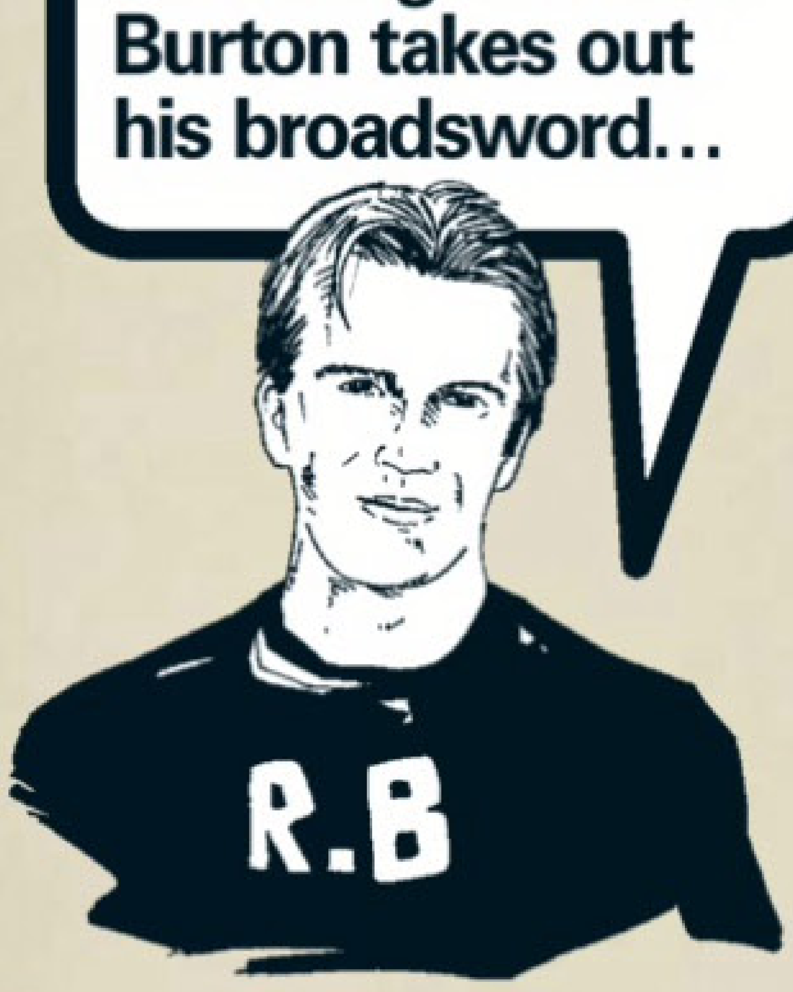


[Arcade] It may look like something a small child would play but *Space Bomber* was a cute but challenging shoot-'em-up.



THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 1998

JULY 1998 – Sega reveal all, F-Zero X speeds in, WOPR takes on NORAD in WarGames, Guilty Gear feels no loss of dimension while Space Bomber and Soul Calibur give arcades a good thrashing. Richard Burton takes out his broadsword…



July was a month of confirmation for Sega and its new console with the name, hardware, games, controller, price and the release date announced.

After several name changes Sega stuck with Dreamcast, the world's first 128-bit console and priced it at £200. Sega announced that the release dates would be November 1998 for Japan with a 1999 autumnal release for Europe and the USA. Sega over-confidently predicted that European sales alone would hit the 22 million mark during the Dreamcast's lifetime. Time would show that total worldwide sales in its 18 month commercial lifespan would be just over 10 million.

Sega also introduced us to the Visual Memory Unit, released this month, which was a device that acted as a memory card but also did much more. It would have its own small monochrome display, D-pad and would plug directly into the Dreamcast controller. Furthermore, you could also download mini-games or in-game features to the VMU. First impressions of the VMU were very favourable, and a special Godzilla-themed edition complete with virtual pet game, was made available exclusively for consumers in Japan.

The first and only game to be confirmed for the Dreamcast was *D2* developed by WARP. It was a dark and foreboding survival horror played in first and third perspectives depending on your in-game location.

Despite some very detailed and atmospheric graphics backed up by an eerie soundtrack, the gameplay was crippled by the sheer drudgery of playing it. If the gameplay had received a fraction of the time spent developing the graphics then *D2* would've been excellent. It didn't and therefore wasn't.

Futuristic racing game *F-Zero X* debuted on the Nintendo 64 this month with its plasma-powered gravity defying racing cars slipping around the tracks in a galactic Grand Prix. Each race consisted of 30 cars and there were five exceedingly testing modes including a new 'Death Race' option which gave you the opportunity to kill every other competitor in a race against the clock.

There were 30 vehicles to choose from, although this was initially limited to just six as you would have to unlock them as you progress further into the

THIS MONTH IN…

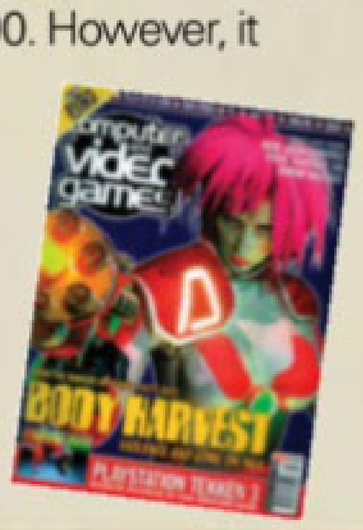
NINTENDO POWER

The flagship Ninty magazine was in high spirits as it had reached its ten year anniversary with issue 110. The team celebrated by featuring a retrospective news article of the major gaming events and software releases of the past ten years. Not entirely sure if that sort of article will ever catch on…



COMPUTER AND VIDEO GAMES

The *C&VG* crew should also have been in celebratory mood with *C&VG* reaching the landmark of issue 200. However, it was business as usual with no fanfare bar a couple of small boxouts. *C&VG* would continue for another six years before succumbing after a 23 year run.



GAME PRO

The mag had news on *ClayFighter: Sculptor's Cut*, a rental-only exclusive version (available only at Blockbuster Video) of *ClayFighter 63* with added extras and characters. Due to the rental-only nature of the cartridge, copies now command a high price making it a rare and expensive N64 title to find.



game. For the personal touch you could also customize your ride. Another nice touch was the X Cup which generated a new track every time you played. Despite criticism regarding the rather uninspired graphics, the gameplay more than made up for this with the sheer velocity of the cars helped by the eye-wateringly fast frame-rate.

Out for PlayStation and PC was *WarGames: Defcon 1*, a game based on the 1983 cult movie. The two formats played differently with the PC version being a real-time strategy game while the PlayStation was more of a tactical shooter affair.

In both variants you could play as NORAD or WOPR (War Operation Planned Response) pitting both sides against each other. WOPR tries to wipe out the human race while NORAD aims to stop WOPR in a variety of missions and campaigns. Both sides control armies: NORAD has old school soldiers and tanks while WOPR has walking mechanoids and hover vehicles.

While both formats had very average single player modes, the PC version also has a nifty four-player multiplayer option and the PlayStation a co-operative two-player split screen option. Sadly both formats lacked playability and failed to recreate the feeling and nostalgia of the movie. Maybe the developer Interactive Studios should have offered a free acoustic coupler with each purchase.

In an era when fighting games were all seemingly texture mapped 3D polygon encrusted monstrosities, with stunningly beautiful graphics paired with gameplay that stunk like a pair of warm gorgonzola underpants, suddenly a refreshing return to the 2D fighting genre appeared: the excellent *Guilty Gear* for PlayStation. It had splendid graphics, an equally adept soundtrack and played like a dream with its ferociously fast gameplay. The learning curve was somewhat steep, but once overcome it was hugely enjoyable.

There were ten characters to choose from and a further three unlockable. Simply win two out of three rounds to proceed. The storyline was nothing original, although each fighter had their own backstory: fighters enter a tournament set in the future to find a champion to fight the mutual enemy. In this case it's the Gears, an experimental DNA mix of animal and human that went catastrophically wrong. *Guilty Gear* really illustrated that there is always room for quality 2D fighting games and multiple sequels followed across various formats.

In coin-op land there were two new releases that caught the eye. First up was *Space Bomber* by Psiyko, a cute-'em-up which saw your standard enemies replaced by shiny smiling swarm of colourful octopuses and a range of other cartoony characters. It was good solid fun and charming, too.

Soul Calibur by Namco also arrived in arcades, and was met with happiness from gamers and reviewers alike. The game was a fighting game with a heavy accent on the use of weapons. An unusual but welcome aspect to the gameplay was the depth control of your character. Rather than just move forward and back on the landscapes, Namco introduced an eight-way movement system which allowed you to move into or pull out of the playfield. It wasn't quite free roaming, but it was certainly more flexible and interesting than most other fighting games. *Soul Calibur* became such a fan favourite that Sega chose to port it to the Dreamcast as one of its launch titles. *


[Nintendo 64] *F-Zero X* wasn't strong in the graphics field, but its gameplay was top-drawer.


[PlayStation] *Guilty Gear* was a return to the days of beat-'em-ups when playability trumped 3D polygons.


[PlayStation] It's back to the Eighties with *WarGames*, WOPR, NORAD and acoustic couplers.

NEWS JULY 1998

6 July saw the death of Roy Rogers, American film and TV actor/singer, who appeared in over 100 movies. He died of heart failure aged 86.

12 July saw the FIFA World Cup final between France and Brazil with the French emphatically winning 3-0 with goals from Zinedine Zidane and Emmanuel Petit.

The pre-match build-up was dramatic, too, with Brazilian striker Ronaldo mysteriously omitted from the team but reinstated shortly before kick-off. Ronaldo had suffered a convulsive fit hours before the match but declared himself well enough to play. He played but well below par.

15 July saw a world premiere for a movie at the other end of the celluloid spectrum. *There's Something About Mary* starred Cameron Diaz, Ben Stiller and Matt Dillon and told the story of Ted (Stiller) who has a disastrous prom date with Mary (Diaz) involving a zip and a testicle. Years later Ted decides to hire a detective (Dillon) to track Mary down resulting in a terrific gross-out romantic comedy.

24 July saw the premiere of *Saving Private Ryan* starring Tom Hanks. Set in World War II during the Invasion Of Normandy, it tells the story of the search for a lost paratrooper, Private James Ryan. It would win many awards for its realistic depiction of combat including the Best Director Oscar for Steven Spielberg.

Notable album releases this month included *Stunt* (Barenaked Ladies), *The Chemical Wedding* (Bruce Dickinson), *Volume 8: The Threat Is Real* (Anthrax) and *Pixies At The BBC* (Pixies).

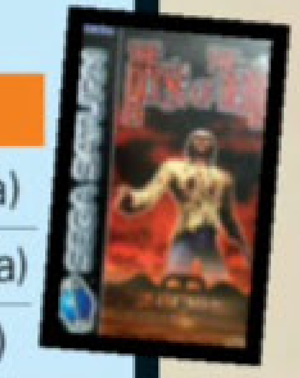
CHARTS

JULY 1998



PLAYSTATION

1 Gran Turismo (Sony)
2 Resident Evil (Virgin Interactive)
3 Tomb Raider: Platinum (Eidos)
4 Tekken 2: Platinum (Sony)
5 Crash Bandicoot: Platinum (Sony)



SEGA SATURN

1 House Of The Dead (Sega)
2 Panzer Dragoon Saga (Sega)
3 Steep Slope Sliders (Sega)
4 Resident Evil (Capcom)
5 Marvel Super Heroes (Capcom)



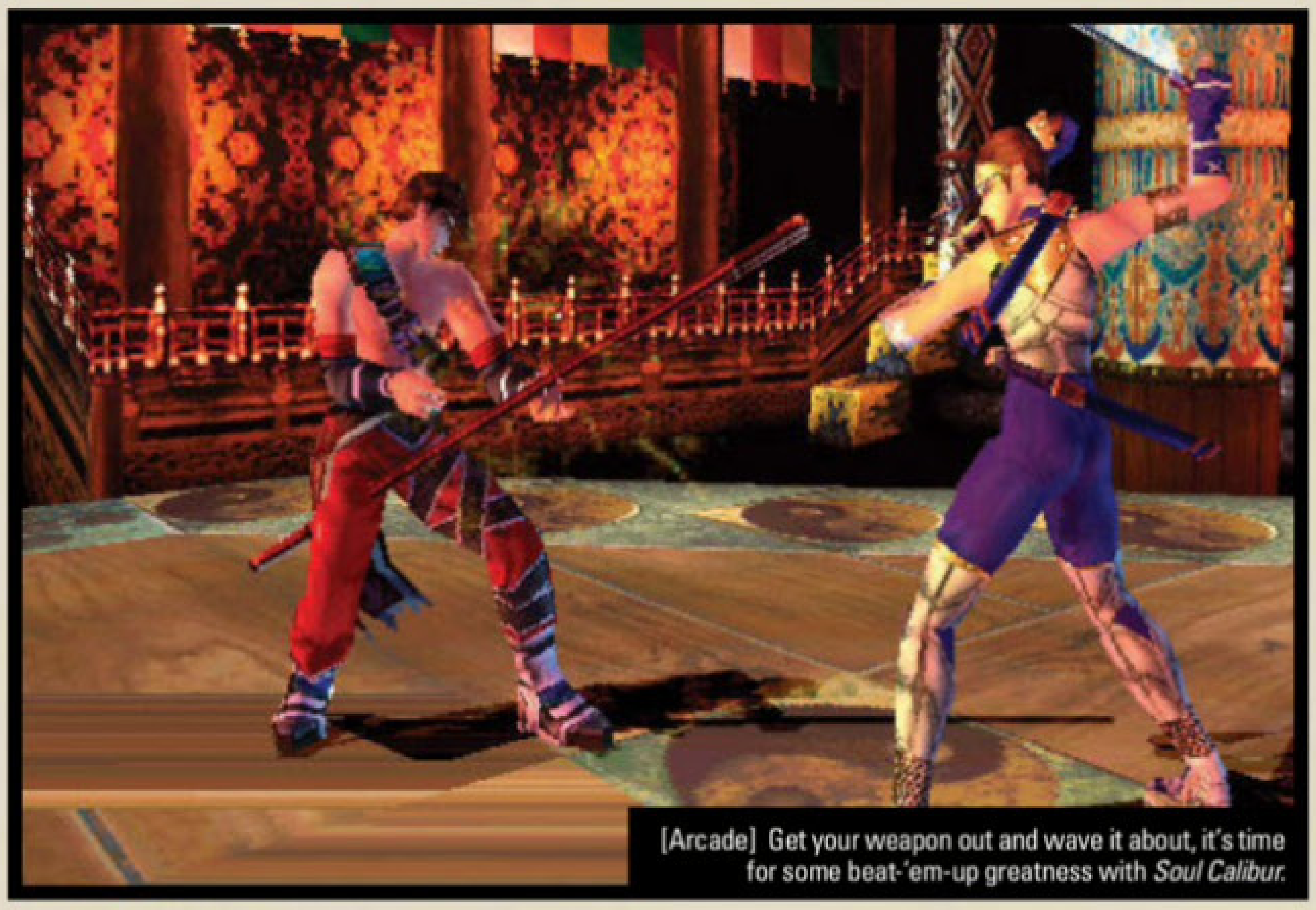
PC

1 Tomb Raider: Unfinished Business (Eidos)
2 Ultimate Soccer Manager '98 (Cendant)
3 Lula: The Sexy Empire (Take 2)
4 Grand Theft Auto (BMG)
5 FIFA '98: Road To The World Cup (Electronic Arts)



MUSIC

1 Ghetto Supastar (That Is What You Are) – (Pras Michel Ft. ODB & Maya)
2 Freak Me (Another Level)
3 Because We Want To (Billie)
4 C'est La Vie (B*Witched)
5 Deeper Underground (Jamiroquai)


[Arcade] Get your weapon out and wave it about, it's time for some beat-'em-up greatness with *Soul Calibur*.

Shark! Shark!

"FROM THIS MOMENT ON, YOU SHALL NOW BE KNOWN AS 'SHARKBAIT'"

#90

» MATTEL » INTELLIVISION » 1982

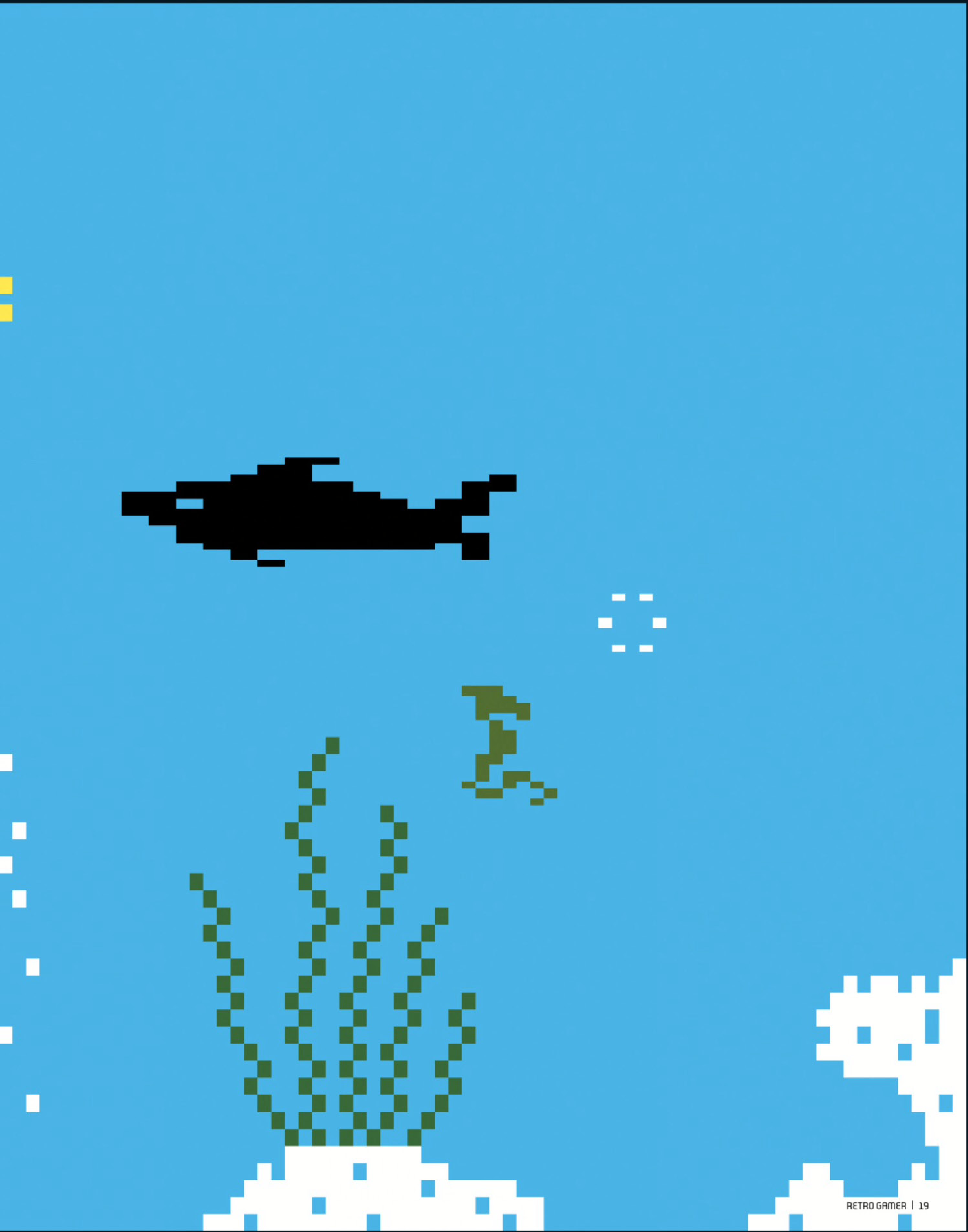
In *Shark! Shark!* you play as a small fish in the deep ocean. You don't want to stay small for long, though, as there are many other creatures out there that will see you as a tasty light snack.

At the start all you can do is eat fish that are the same size as you. Eat enough of these to reach 1000 points and you grow in size. Then, you are able to eat slightly larger fish. You can grow in size about five times, each time you also get an extra life but once you reach full size, you only get extra lives from that point onward.

It's not just fish in the ocean that you come across, though, all kinds of sea creatures live in the blue. Along the seabed crabs and lobsters reach out for you whatever size you may be. Later on as you gain points and size, jellyfish appear ready to sting you. These will all eat each other, but they all get out of the way of one thing, the shark. No creature can eat the shark, but clever players can bite his tail and swim off quickly. Big points are awarded for doing this. Be warned, though, the more you progress, the quicker the shark becomes.

Shark! Shark! is a colourful game. The fish and other creatures come in all shapes, colours and sizes. When the shark appears a suitable sound lets you know. But as with these early games, it can soon get a bit repetitive, as all you can do is rack up points and run out of lives as it gets faster and harder. *

ASH H



Amstrad CPC464

» **MANUFACTURER:** Amstrad » **YEAR:** June 1984 » **COST:** £239 (GREEN-SCREEN MONITOR) £349 (COLOUR MONITOR)

Arriving late to a hardware generation is never a smart move unless you've got a pretty impressive trick up your sleeve. But with the CPC464, Amstrad did just that. While the machine's development was, by all accounts, a somewhat bumpy road, launching with an all-in-one package made up for its late arrival to market – a built-in tape deck and bundled monitor (in both affordable green-screen and luxury colour variants) offered a level of value and convenience that its peers couldn't match, and Amstrad's debut gained traction staggeringly fast as a result. Sticking to European territories proved a smart move, too. More powerful hardware meant the CPC had a clear edge over Spectrum machines in terms of visuals (although this wasn't always utilised), while its focused marketing managed to offer a foothold against Commodore's somewhat diluted global advances.

While it was billed as an all-purpose computer, the CPC was clearly a games machine first and foremost, especially in the case of the 464. And while it couldn't offer all that much in the way of true exclusives – the early Amsoft range was, aside from a couple of titles, little to write home about – it did have a huge number of games available at launch and the quicker processor allowed for some superb arcade ports that often put their peers to shame. And while later Amstrad machines may have seen the company fail to repeat its original success, that will not change the fact that it managed to prove that being late to the party wasn't necessarily a bad thing. ★



ESSENTIAL GAME Get Dexter



Isometric games were all the rage in the 8-bit era, but few could offer the level of detail or character that ERE Informatique managed to squeeze into this superb adventure. Just compare this to the other isometric classics – *Knightlore*, *Batman*, *Head Over Heels* – and try to tell us that this isn't impressive. The use of colour and level of detail is leagues ahead of its peers and even though the game might have suffered from a lot of the problems as its stablemates, it's nonetheless a showcase for the sheer power of the CPC.



Hardware fact

■ The CPC 464 was the first of six models released by Amstrad over a 7-year period. It was succeeded by the CPC 664, CPC 6128, 464 plus, 6128 plus and the GX4000, Amstrad's only console.

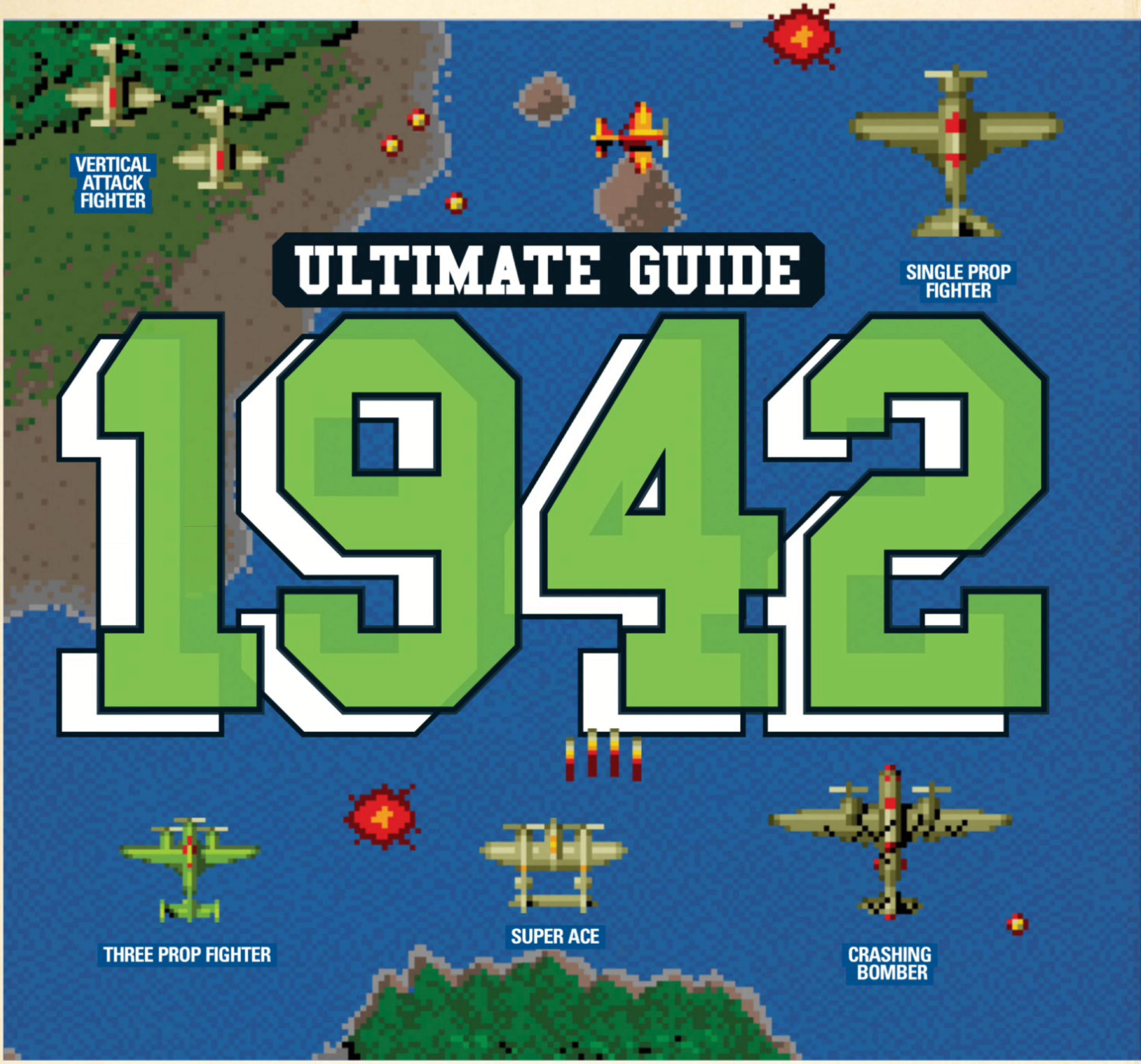
RAM: 64KB

PROCESSOR: ZILOG Z80A (4MHZ)

OPERATING SYSTEM: LOCOMOTIVE BASIC

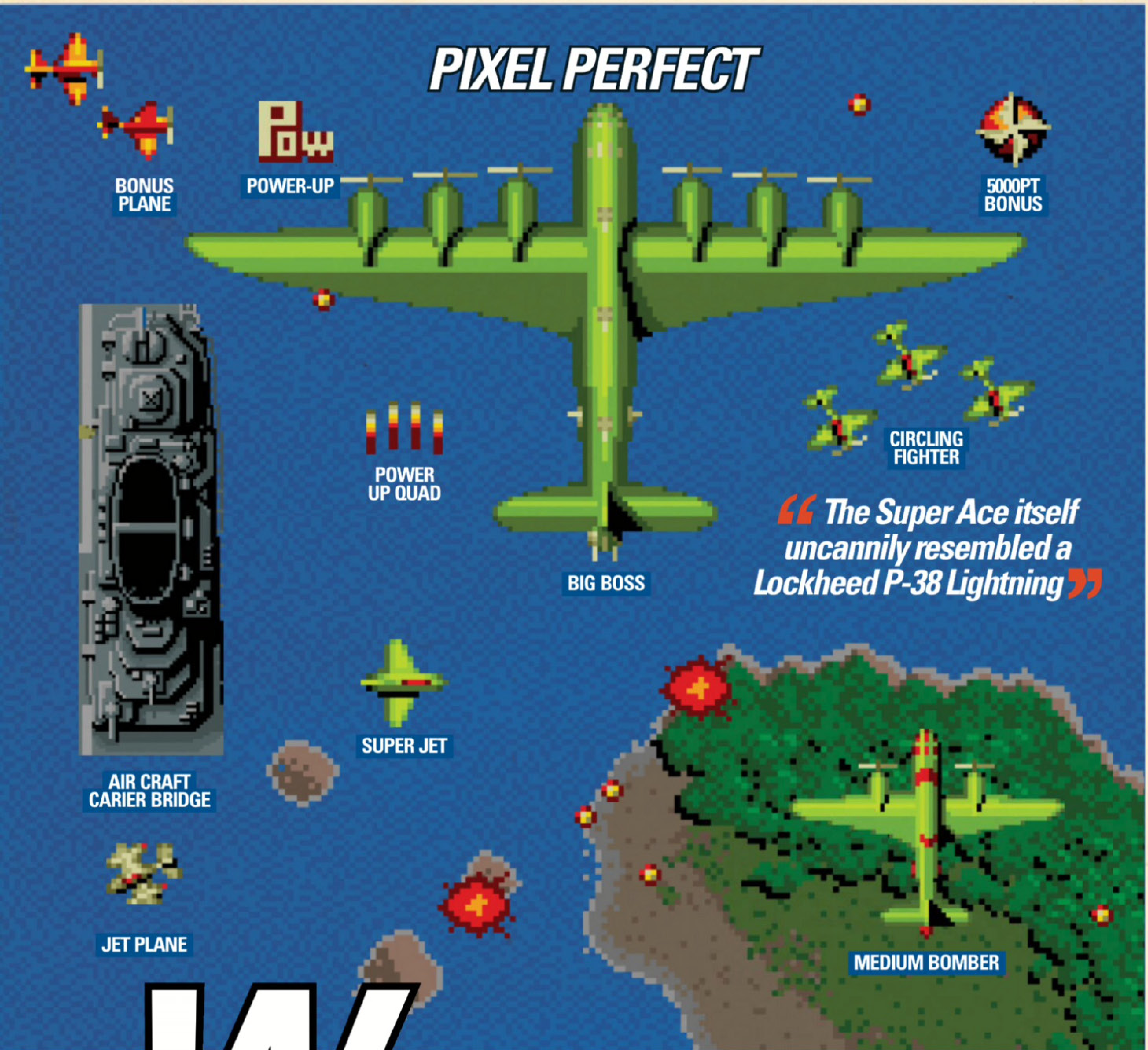
FORMAT: CASSETTE/FLOPPY DISK (3")

TOTAL SOLD: 3 MILLION



ONE OF A REVERED GROUP OF GAMES THAT HELPED PROPEL CAPCOM INTO THE BIG TIME BACK IN THE MID-EIGHTIES, 1942 HAS SINCE PROVED TO BE AN ENDURING SERIES. SO BUCKLE UP AND JOIN YOUR CO-PILOT, GRAEME MASON, AS WE LOOK BACK AT THE ORIGINAL WORLD WAR II ARCADE GAME. OUR DESTINATION: TOKYO

PIXEL PERFECT



"The Super Ace itself uncannily resembled a Lockheed P-38 Lightning"

We can only speculate as to the atmosphere in the meeting when 23-year-old Yoshiki Okamoto pitched the idea of *1942* to Capcom suits. Given that the game involves playing as an American fighter pilot whose sole mission is to annihilate as much of the Japanese air force as possible before reaching the capital of Tokyo, it's hard to imagine the reception being anything but frosty. Yet, fortunately for shoot-'em-up fans everywhere, the game was given the nod and an enduring, if slightly underappreciated, series zoomed into the skies.

Yoshiki Okamoto began his videogaming career at Konami, where he designed two popular shoot-'em-ups, *Gyruss* and *Time Pilot*. For reasons lost in the Pacific clouds, Okamoto's career at the arcade giant ended abruptly which was good news for his next employers, Capcom, who took the young man on as a games programmer and director in 1984. Perhaps using the latter of his two Konami hits as inspiration, Okamoto created *1942* in his first year at Capcom along with the cute platformer, *SonSon*. It was the World War II-based shoot-'em-up, however, that would transform not only his career, but also jump start an successful period for the Japanese company.

1942



HOW TO PLAY

Your guide to becoming a flying ace

1



Shoot down all of these crimson planes and a useful power-up is dropped, from quad shot to a brace of wingtip colleagues. Be warned, though: don't get sucked too far up the screen trying to take these guys out or you'll be a in a whole world of pain.

2



You get three loop-the-loops per level and don't forget them as they are vital for escaping sticky situations. On later levels it's worth keeping one in the bank as there are a couple of plane formations that can only be avoided with this nifty stunt.

3



Sticking to the bottom of the screen is a hazardous tactic with various enemy bombers and fighters frequently zooming up behind you. Fortunately they don't fire until they are in front of the Super Ace.

4



This bomber arrives from behind the player and takes up a large part of the screen. It's not troublesome on its own, but you want to take it down before enemy fighters start buzzing around it.

5



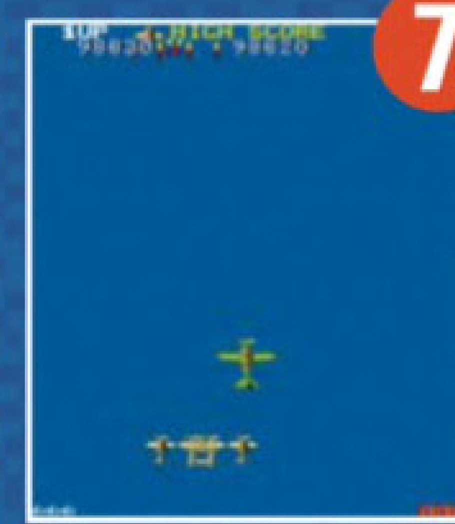
This behemoth appears periodically throughout the stages and spits a mass of bullets at you. You can avoid these using loops or ducking just to the left or right of its gargantuan wings.

6



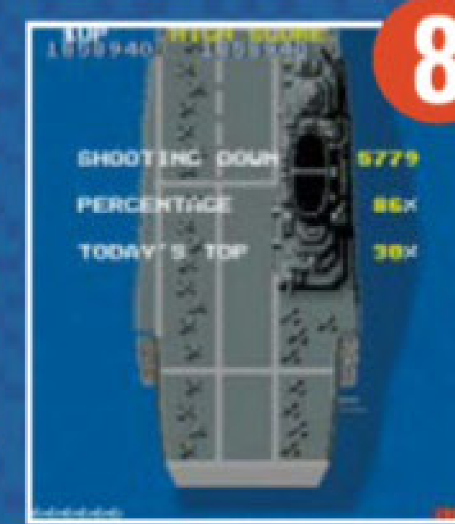
Make sure to grab a power-up whenever they appear on the screen, These can range from a four-shot (or quad shot) gun, a powerful smart bomb, additional wing men, extra loops and even an handy extra life.

7



Here's a useful trick with the bonus wingmen. While they are useful, their life span is extremely limited due to the increased target size they represent. So you might as well use them to smash and destroy the tougher multi-hit planes.

8



1942 uses percentages to calculate the bonuses at the end of the stage. Each shot is counted and the hit-to-miss ratio is used to determine the points awarded. Achieve 100% and a special bonus of 50,000 points is granted.

9



One wingman is good, two wingmen is not so good. Despite the lesser firepower, the combination of Super Ace plus one wing man represents the best ratio of weaponry to your overall target size.

10



Notice that lone small plane that slowly edges its way onto the screen from the lower left or right of the screen? Shoot this guy and it drops a strange symbol which grants a 5000 point bonus.

1942 took the template laid down by Namco's *Xevious* and transferred the plot and graphics to a World War II setting with the player's aircraft, and many of the enemy planes, inspired by real-life counterparts. This was a huge deal at the time, giving *1942* a layer of authenticism and realism that simply wasn't seen in other shooters. While Konami, Irem and others were obsessed with deep space, Okamoto decided to ground *1942* in realism. Fantasy realism admittedly, but realism nonetheless, and it worked exceptionally well. The Super Ace itself uncannily resembled a Lockheed P-38 Lightning, while the pale colours of the Mitsubishi Zero can be discerned for the Japanese air forces. The lesser-known Kawasaki Ki-48 appears to have influenced the bomber that arrives frequently from the bottom of the screen, while the gigantic heavy behemoth that appears at the conclusion of four different stages would seem to have been inspired by a combination of two Nakajima aircraft. Both the G8N and G10N were designed by Japanese engineers with attacks upon the United States mainland in mind, but having been conceived in 1943, they never made it past prototype stages due to Japan's worsening situation in the war. The proposed armament for the G10N in particular made *1942*'s bullet-spitting plane not quite as far-fetched as it looked.

SEQUELS

We take a look at the rest of the 1942 franchise. Have you played them?













1943: THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY
■ ARCADE ■ 1987

While *1942* might win in the nostalgia stakes, there's no doubt *1943* is a superior game thanks to its health bar (instead of the frustrating one-hit system) and a improved selection of weapons, enemies and backdrops. The Super Joe also has a new array of supernatural powers such as cyclone, lightning and tsunami, there's also a co-op two player option and some decent tunes.

1943 KAI: MIDWAY KAISEN
■ ARCADE ■ 1988

Released only in Japan, and a year after *1943: The Battle Of Midway*, this game boasted updated graphics and sound design and it featured a totally different main plane; in fact, this time around it was an incongruous biplane. Western gamers eventually got to play *1943 Kai* thanks to the PlayStation compilation *Generations* but it definitely remains a bit of an oddity in the series.

1941: COUNTER ATTACK
■ ARCADE ■ 1990

As the name would suggest, this fourth game in the series is actually a prequel, with the action taking place a year prior to the original game. Beautiful, sleek graphics and challenging gameplay made *Counter Attack* a supreme entry in the series as the Super Joe shifted to the Western Front and those nefarious Nazis, this time aided by a British Mosquito aircraft in the two player co-op mode.

19XX: THE WAR AGAINST DESTINY
■ ARCADE ■ 1995

The series well and truly took the leap into the fantastical with this 1995 sequel which created its own fictional war as a back story. The player can now select different planes to fly (the Lightning and Mosquito from previous games and a new, faster but weaker plane), and thanks to an updated board (the CPS-2) the game also had a more distinctive look to the previous games.

1944: THE LOOP MASTER
■ ARCADE ■ 2000

The first game in the series not to be created in-house at Capcom, the *Loop Master* dispensed with the alternate timeline and also differed in style to its predecessor, harking back to the design of the original games. The charge shot remained, but in came the health bar and, released in 2000, the game was strictly old school, yet it was still rather popular in arcades.

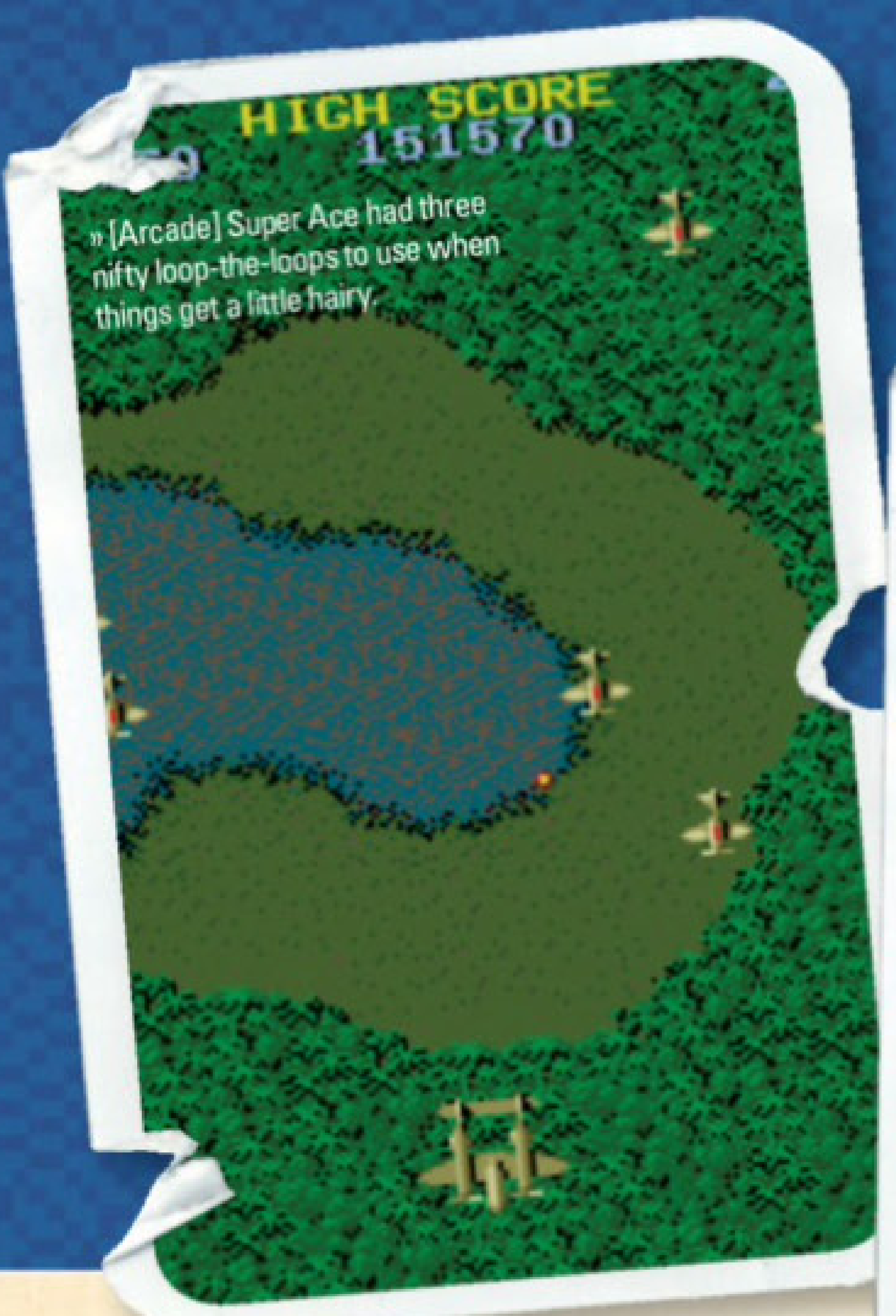


1942: JOINT STRIKE
■ XBLA & PSN ■ 2008

While the title may suggest it's a remake of the original, *Joint Strike* is actually very different, justifying its inclusion in this section. Released digitally for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, the game adopts a pseudo-3D effect but is not really any better for it, and lacks the charm of the arcade originals.

1942: FIRST STRIKE
■ iOS ■ 2009

As with *Joint Strike*, this game was completely new, despite its title. Implementing a slower pace (made necessary by the awkward touch controls of mobile devices), the shooter proved particularly unsuited to the format and the graphics were dated. Still, the music is nice.

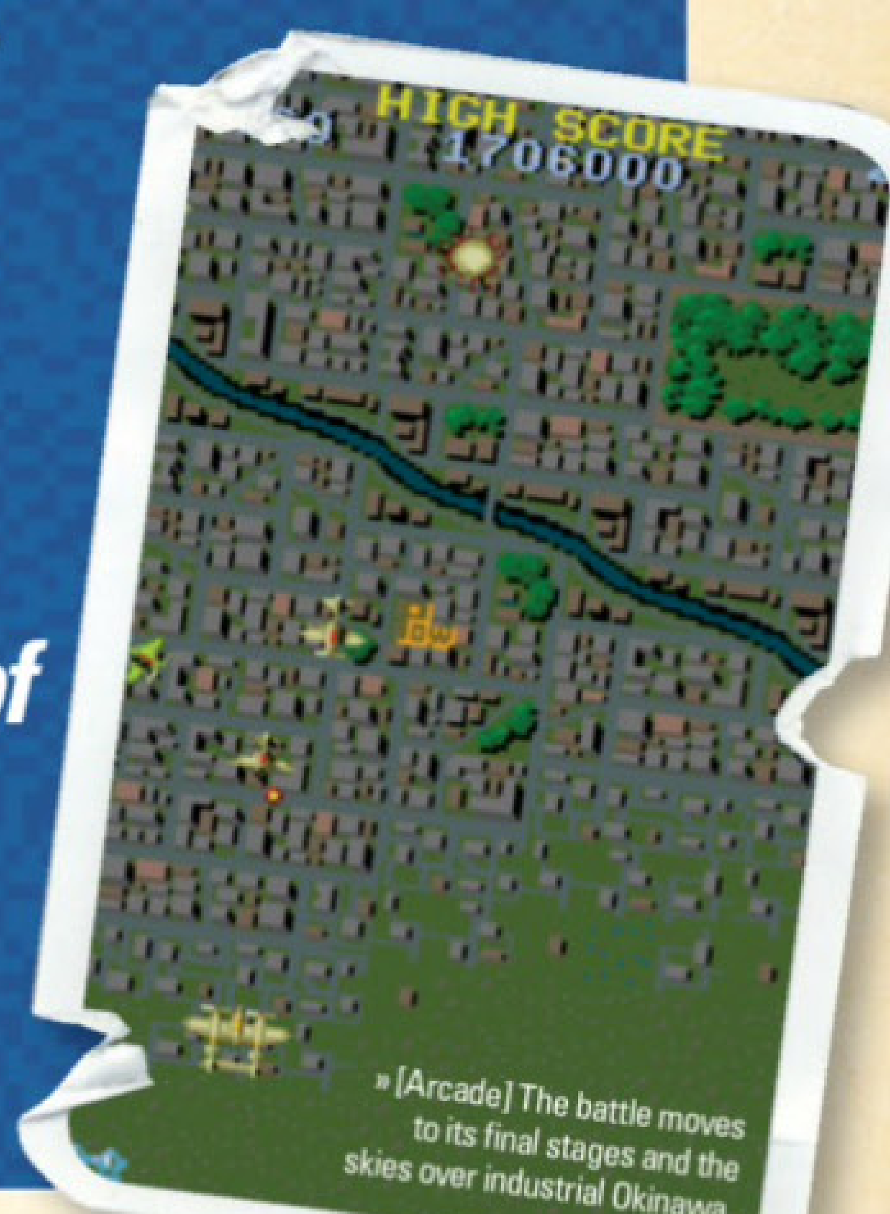


» [Arcade] Super Ace had three nifty loop-the-loops to use when things get a little hairy.



» [Arcade] Things look a little depressing upon nearing the mainland.

"The action was fast-paced, driven by an incessant barrage of enemy planes and an infernal whistling sound"



» [Arcade] The battle moves to its final stages and the skies over industrial Okinawa.

Like the aforementioned *Xevious*, *1942*'s enemies attacked in waves and patterns with an occasional formation of red aeroplanes dropping power-ups if the entire phalanx was shot down. These varied from a quad shot to a useful smart bomb that destroyed all on-screen enemies, and two wingmen (together with the additional firepower). The Super Ace could also perform a handy loop-the-loop which rendered the plane temporarily invulnerable, thus gaining a couple of seconds to extricate it from a sticky situation. Like many arcade games before it, careful memorisation of the key moments when these abilities would come in useful was critical in attaining progression to the next stage.

Technically, *1942* was nothing special, and not a huge jump up from its famous sci-fi inspiration from two years earlier with its main CPU a 4 MHz Zilog Z80 chip and a screen resolution of 256x224. But the action was fast-paced, driven by an incessant barrage of enemy planes and an infernal whistling sound. Whether the latter was supposed to represent some sort of manic marching band or a drill sergeant's call, it formed a bizarre soundtrack to a game that was ▶

1942

CONVERSION CAPERS

The best and worst conversions of Capcom's classic arcade game



ZX SPECTRUM

■ Elite had forged an excellent reputation on the 8-bits thanks to its conversions of *Commando* and *Ghosts 'N' Goblins*, but it came a cropper with *1942*. Like the Amstrad version, it's on the sluggish side, and a lack of decent sound coupled with colour clash, a drab yellow background and some very hard to spot enemy bullets make it far from a classic.





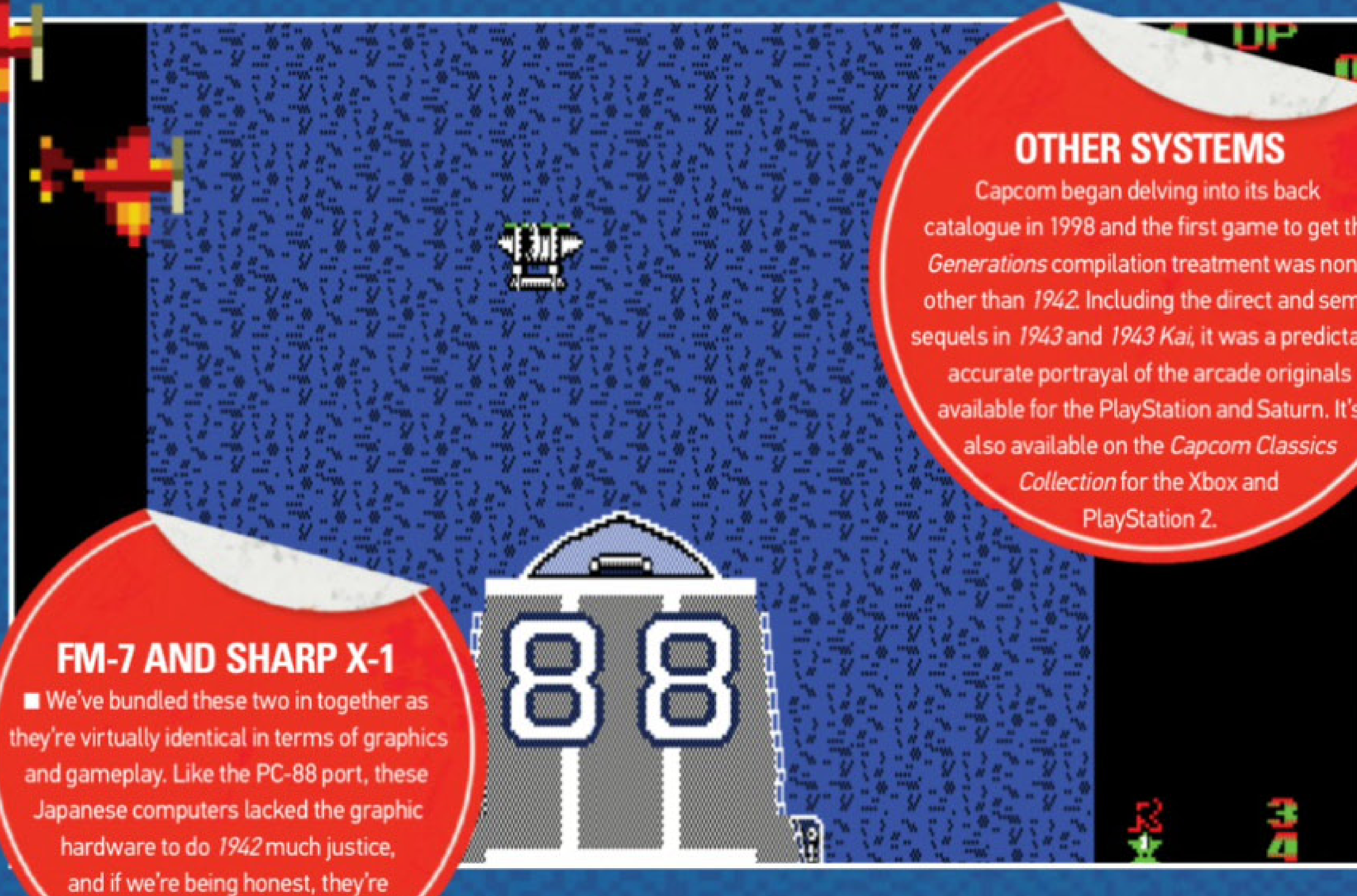
AMSTRAD CPC

■ While it's reasonably playable, the Amstrad CPC port of *1942* is unsatisfying thanks to a slow pace that sucks much of the excitement from the game. Crunching sound effects redeem it slightly and it is at least possible to progress a fair way without cheating.

MSX

■ This version starts off impressively with a beautifully detailed aircraft carrier and the rest of the game is pretty nifty, too. Smart, authentic, graphics are complemented by a frantic tempo that mirrors the arcade, although it is perhaps a little *too* pacey for our liking. Despite some flickery sprites on occasion, this is a pleasant surprise and one of the better home computer ports.

> "1942 had a neat scoring system that rewarded players for accuracy as well as survival"



OTHER SYSTEMS

Capcom began delving into its back catalogue in 1998 and the first game to get the *Generations* compilation treatment was none other than *1942*. Including the direct and semi-sequels in *1943* and *1943 Kai*, it was a predictably accurate portrayal of the arcade originals available for the PlayStation and Saturn. It's also available on the *Capcom Classics Collection* for the Xbox and PlayStation 2.



PC-88

■ NEC's PC-88 received an ambitious arcade conversion, and it's hard to recommend it. A limited colour palette (admittedly the sea looks very nice), slow jerky scrolling and some juddery sprites coalesce to make this a port of *1942* best consigned to history.



NES

■ A well-crafted difficulty curve and faithful graphics make the NES version a good effort. Like many conversions, it suffered by being released in 1986 when superior shoot-'em-ups were about and is also plagued by the horrible beeping from the original.

FM-7 AND SHARP X-1

■ We've bundled these two in together as they're virtually identical in terms of graphics and gameplay. Like the PC-88 port, these Japanese computers lacked the graphic hardware to do *1942* much justice, and if we're being honest, they're not much fun.

calling out for an earthy and dramatic theme mixed with the heavy drone of the various aircraft on display. Backgrounds and enemies also varied little over the 32 stages. Green atolls eventually give way to larger, more industrial islands, and there's the appearance of two classes of fanciful jet fighters (including one type that appears based on an German-inspired prototype called the Kayaba Katsuodori). But generally *1942*'s air fleet of opponents and the ground below changes very little over the course of the game.

So why was it such a huge hit for Capcom? Perhaps it was the scenario, which was a novel one for the time, and the universal appeal of shoot-'em-ups. *1942* also had a neat scoring system that rewarded players for accuracy as well as survival, but generally its popularity, nostalgia aside, is a little bemusing. In the arcades it spawned a direct sequel in the imaginatively-titled *1943* which replaced the punishing (yet common) one-hit-and-you're-dead mechanic with a welcome life bar. *1943* was a far superior game, with more detailed backgrounds (including clouds for enemies to sneakily hide behind) and ensured the series would live on for some time to come. Home conversions of *1942* itself were inevitable, although the game was initially ignored as publishers sought to capitalise on Capcom's bigger subsequent

Q&A BOB BAFFY

We spoke to the man who took on this mission, of porting 1942 to the GBC…



How did you come to work on *1942*?
The market for the GBC was insane. Digital Eclipse were flooded with offers from publishers that wanted to capitalize on the new hardware. The result was a shortage of programmers, and I wanted to stretch a bit and see if I could do it. Up until that point I had mainly been involved with the art and the sound design.

It must have seemed odd, converting a game that was 15 years old at the time?
Actually Capcom wanted a conversion of the NES version of the game. I would have loved to have converted the arcade version, but the schedule was tight and it was looking to put out GBC versions of all its NES classics. The thought was that since the hardware was similar, it would be simple, but in reality it wasn't any easier as they had to be recreated from scratch.

How difficult was it adapting the game to the Game Boy Color's small screen?
There was a bit of adaptation needed. For example, the enemy patterns had to be edited not only because of the screen size, but to take into account that the player wasn't able to move as much. The boss plane was actually part of the background maps with invisible collision boxes and bullet spawn points designed to make it look like it was a giant sprite!

Sadly, the siren made it in…
I hated that beep sequence, I recall Capcom insisting it remained in. As a sound designer I would have loved to have written more music and sound effects, but again, time was not on our side.

So were you pleased with the final result in the end?
Not until several years later. Like any creative endeavour, you usually find yourself looking at the flaws. But now I look back with fondness, despite the stress. I did nearly everything myself on the game and was set to be married during its development as well! I don't think I would ever want to take on a project like that myself ever again, though…

We'd like to thank Bob for sharing his memories with us.



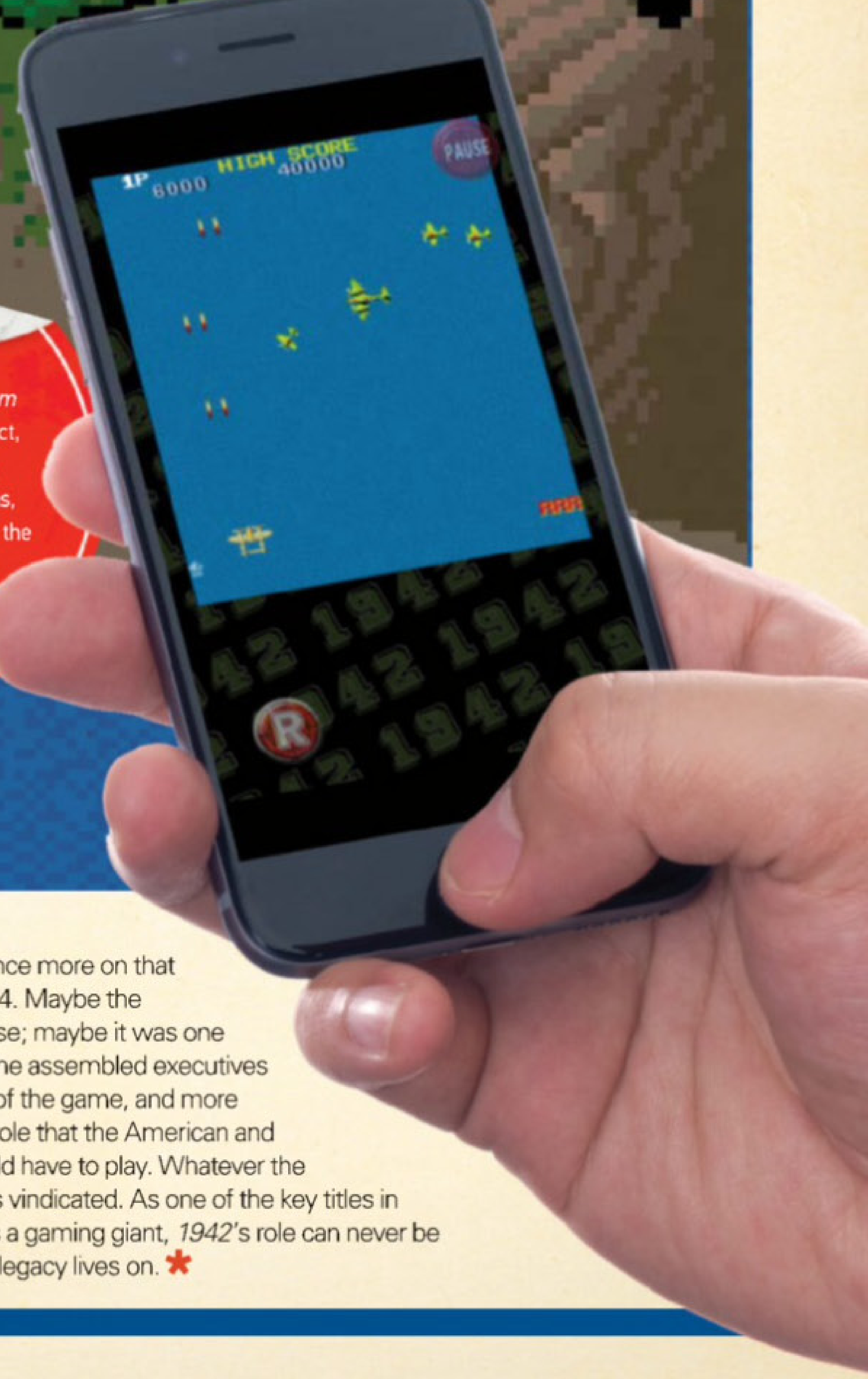
GAME BOY COLOR

■ Actually a conversion of the NES version, developer Digital Eclipse did an admirable job squeezing *1942* onto the Game Boy Color. Despite an inevitably cramped screen, the game plays very smoothly, and the only major drawback is an unfortunate super-irritating recreation of the original's 'whistling' marching band soundtrack.

COMMODORE 64

■ The C64 conversion is a strange beast; the graphics are excellent and the game plays a lovely rendition of the theme to *633 Squadron* (courtesy of Mark Cooksey), but it's hard to recommend due to its difficulty. The squashed screen and faster enemy bullets are bad enough; cheap deaths from airplanes arriving rapidly behind the player are inexcusable. Frustrating.





iOS

■ Available as part of the *Capcom Arcade* app, and, as you might expect, this is an accurate port. However it suffers from the on-screen controls as, despite the Super Ace set to auto fire, the player's finger frequently obscures enemy planes, making it a frustrating experience.

hits. Following the success of *Commando* and *Ghosts 'N' Goblins*, *1942* was licensed by Elite Systems for release on the Amstrad CPC, Commodore 64 and ZX Spectrum, and its use of different developers was obvious as each offered a different and unique experience. Capcom themselves handled some conversions which included a rather credible MSX effort, while ASCII Corporation developed the game for the Japanese home computer market (including ports for the FM-7, NEC PC-88 and Sharp X1). Typifying *1942*'s longevity, most of the conversions at the time were released in either 1986 or 1987, sometime after the original had debuted in arcades.

But let's speculate once more on that pitch meeting from 1984. Maybe the atmosphere wasn't tense; maybe it was one of excitement. Maybe the assembled executives could see the potential of the game, and more critically, the increased role that the American and European markets would have to play. Whatever the mood, the decision was vindicated. As one of the key titles in establishing Capcom as a gaming giant, *1942*'s role can never be underestimated and its legacy lives on. *

FireTrack

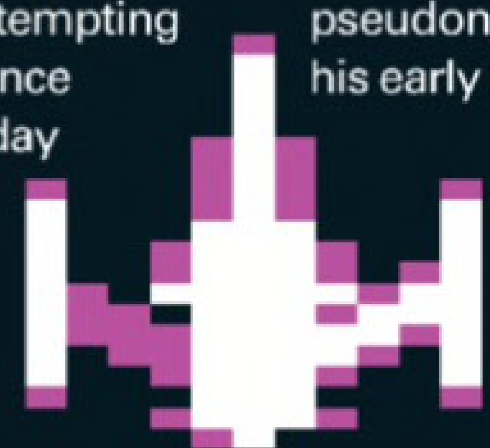
Having impressed BBC Micro gamers with solid clones of Galaxian and Galaga, Nick Pelling resolved to make the machine sing with an ambitious 'operatic space shooter'. Paul Drury finds the fire still burns



FIRETRACK 101

■ Inspired by coin-op *Star Force*, *FireTrack* is a vertically-scrolling shooter which tasks you with blasting your way through eight levels and destroying a nuclear generator, allowing a second run over the now darkened world. Swarms of enemies stand in your way and there are numerous bonuses to target on the surface. Note: Nick pre-empted *WipEout* by almost a decade in dubbing his game *FireTrack* (one word, capital 'T' in the middle), which managed to confuse many a writer.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then the pioneering British bedroom coders of the early Eighties were undoubtedly in thrall to the world of coin-ops. Whether taking inspiration from *Pac-man*, *Defender* or, in *FireTrack*'s case, Tekhan's 1984 hit *Star Force*, aspiring programmers would often cut their coding teeth by attempting to bring the arcade experience to the home micros of the day and Nick Pelling was no different. We assume he must have spent much of his childhood gripping the joystick of a hulking cabinet with a pocket full of ten pence pieces.



"No, not at all," Nick corrects us in his clipped and cultured tones. "It was just whether something would catch my fancy. I was in Norway one time playing chess and a guy showed me this tabletop *Galaga*. I played it four or five times and thought, 'I like that.' I didn't have any screenshots or anything but had this picture in my head. So I went home and I made my own version."

Even before Nick wrote *Zalaga* for the BBC Micro in 1983, a feat of memory as well as technical wizardry it would seem, he had produced several games based on classic arcade titles. Often using the pseudonym 'Orlando M. Pilchard', his early releases for the Acorn Atom included a *Space Invaders* clone and *Hedgehog*, a road-crossing game not dissimilar to *Frogger*, though Nick assures us he'd never seen Konami's amphibian adventure before creating his own take on the old chicken joke. He also produced *Atom Galaxians*, a homage to Namco's elegant shooter, which he sold via adverts in the back of *Your Computer* magazine. It caught the eye of Acornsoft who were eager for schoolboy Nick to convert it for their forthcoming machine, the BBC Micro. "I had a funny old Friday," he recalls, fondly. "All day at school I had this feeling someone was trying to contact me and then on the Saturday, Acornsoft got in touch and said they'd been trying all yesterday. Spooky."

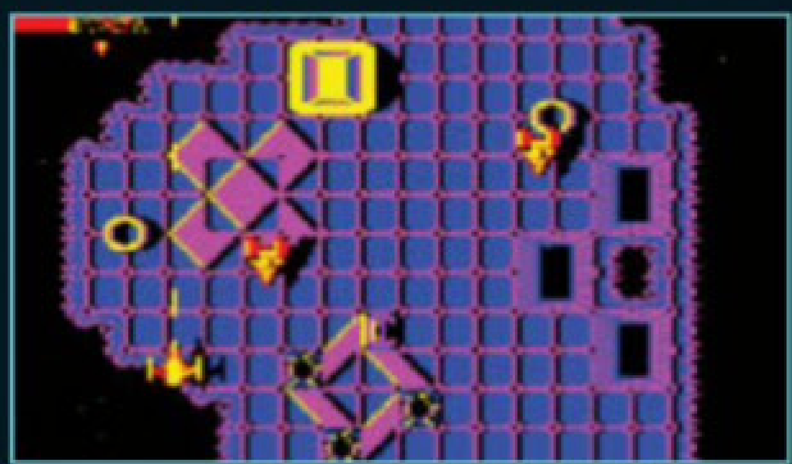


» Nick (right) pictured with Jon 'Sensible Software' Hare, circa 1990.

Nick travelled up to Cambridge and met some of the key members of the Acorn team, including David Johnson-Davies and Tim Dobson, and returned home with a pre-release model of the BBC Micro under his arm. Unfortunately, they had neglected to install a serial port so Nick couldn't save anything. Once this

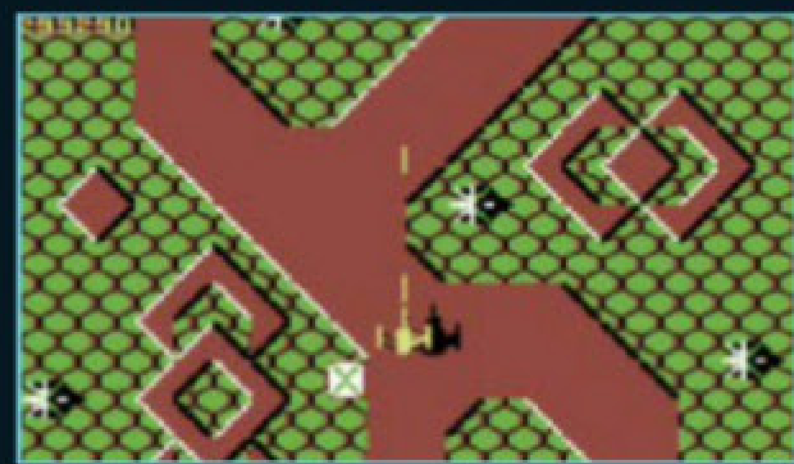
SIDE BY SIDE

Your guide to all three versions



BBC MICRO

■ The lead version really pushed the machine, particularly in terms of speed and scrolling. "It's an adaptive engine," adds Nick, "so if there's more time, the rendering improves. If Acorn had released a faster machine, say 6mhz, it would have been really, really good!"



COMMODORE 64

■ Begun as the BBC version neared completion, this played to the machine's strengths, but kept the aesthetics of the source material, something noted by *Zzap!64* magazine's Gary Penn, who noted its distinctive look and feel and praised its 'organised disorder' in issue 24.



ELECTRON

■ The Electron port appeared two years later, handled by Chris Terran for Superior Software, without any involvement from Nick. He has never played it but was pleased when we assured him that this version was just as garishly coloured as his own.



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** Electric Dreams
- » **DEVELOPER:** Nick 'Orlando' Pelling
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **PLATFORM:** Various
- » **GENRE:** Shoot-'em-up

was rectified, he got busy producing *Arcadians*, released in 1982, which added *Galaxian* to Acornsoft's impressive line-up of arcade clones. We wonder whether he had any qualms about blatantly ripping off established titles?

"A little bit in retrospect," he confesses. "I wish I'd had more balls and done more games like *Frak!*. The problem was, it took a huge effort to make an original game and most of us weren't large companies, just individuals. Look at Imagine Software – they had a marketing machine. Love them or loathe them, it was pretty cutting edge and that gave them a platform to do what they liked. It was just way out of my league."

If you haven't played *Frak!*, an exuberant platformer featuring a potty-mouthed, yo-yo toting caveman, we can assure you that it perfectly embodies that spirit of experimentation and originality, the creative blossoming that epitomised the UK software scene once those bedroom coders had learnt the basics from copying *Breakout*, *Asteroids* et al and wanted to make games that were unmistakably their own. Nick released *Frak!* through his own Aardvark label to much critical acclaim but it sadly wasn't enough to keep the company afloat. "I lost a lot of money on *Frak!* through it being so widely pirated and some big distribution companies going down and not paying me," he sighs. "It was an extremely hostile business environment back then."

"Elite was a space opera and I wanted FireTrack to be a sort of shoot-'em-up space opera" Nick Pelling

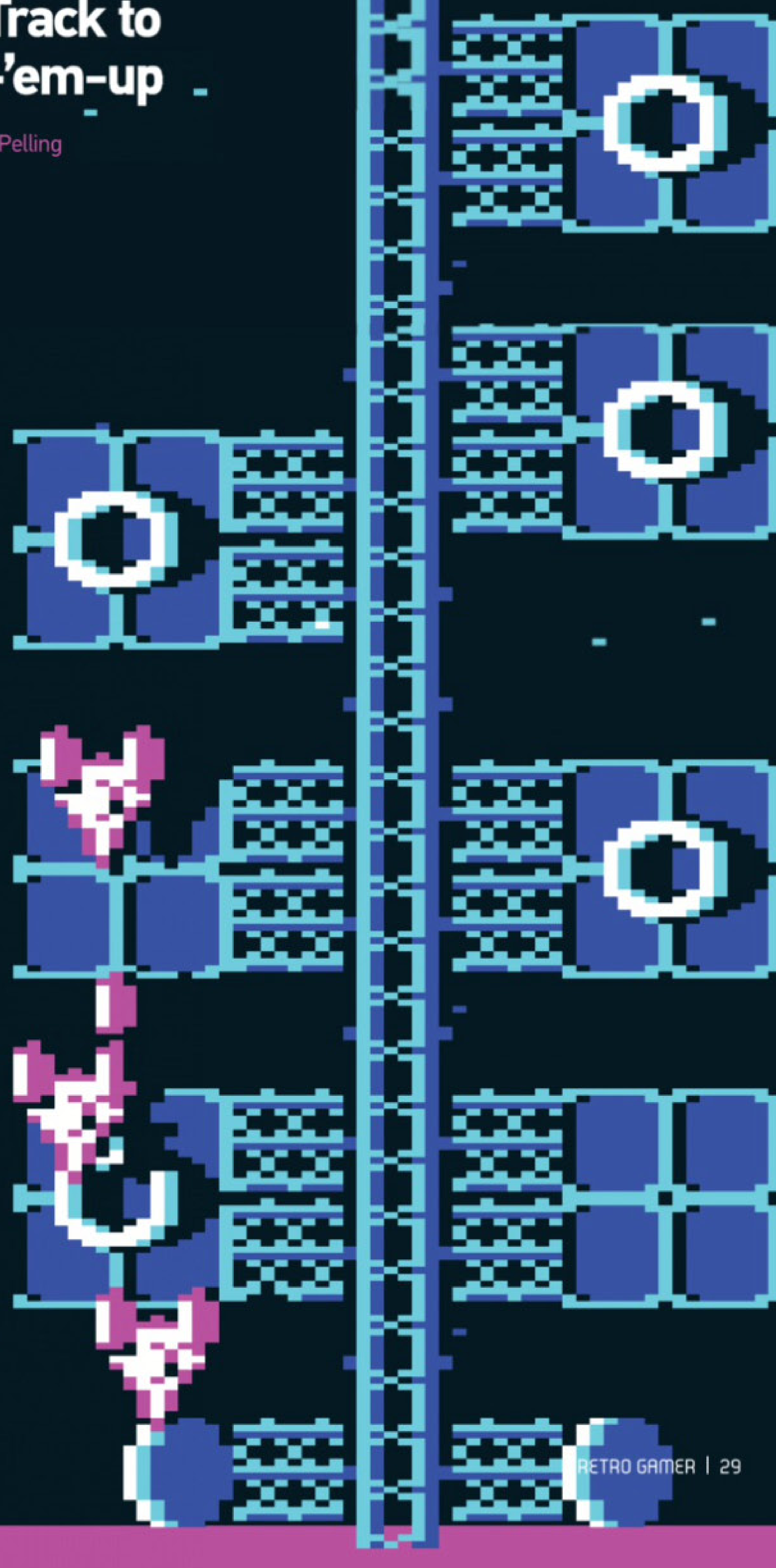
So in 1985, Nick returned to arcade-inspired shooters but this time, he set his sights considerably higher. The popular *Star Force* was part of the first wave of vertical scrolling shooters spearheaded by the likes of *Xevious* and *1942*, and though the BBC Micro had many virtues, handling vertical scrolling wasn't one of them.

"I liked doing high difficulty games," Nick grins. "That's to write, not to play. I wanted to push the machine, not just do so-so stuff, and make something technically ambitious which was also enjoyable to play. *FireTrack* ticked all those boxes. I had scrolling routines but they didn't work and then one day I worked out how I could fake it! You can fiddle with one of the registers and get a scrolling effect within a character. That's the start, at least…"

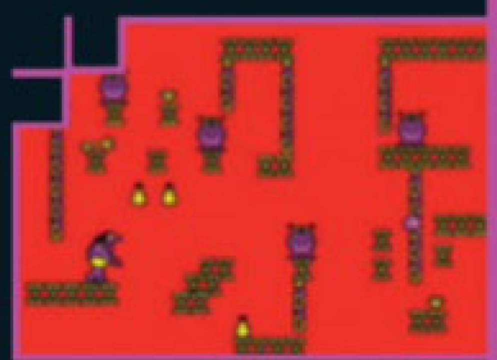


» [BBC Micro] *FireTrack* generously allows you to restart a new game at the last world you completed, an unusual feature back in 1987 and much appreciated ever since.

What follows is a long explanation of ingenious manipulation of the 6845 CRT that controls the screen display, timing techniques, multiple interrupt routines, colour changing, mode switching, creating a screen within a screen, until this little 'jiggle' bloomed into code that smoothly scrolled the entire screen. It would seriously take half of this article ▶







DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ARCADIANS
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1982

FRAK! (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1984

ENDURO RACER
SYSTEM: C64
YEAR: 1986



to explain the intricacies of Nick's tricks but suffice to say, it worked. Beautifully. Smooth vertical scrolling on the humble Beeb, something considered an impossibility, was achieved. Now he just needed a game to show it off.

"I had this image in my mind of an operatic game," Nick declares boldly. "*Elite* was a space opera and I wanted to do a sort of shoot-'em-up space opera. I didn't quite pull it off. The machine was half the speed it needed to be and the technology wasn't really there but I got some of the way…"

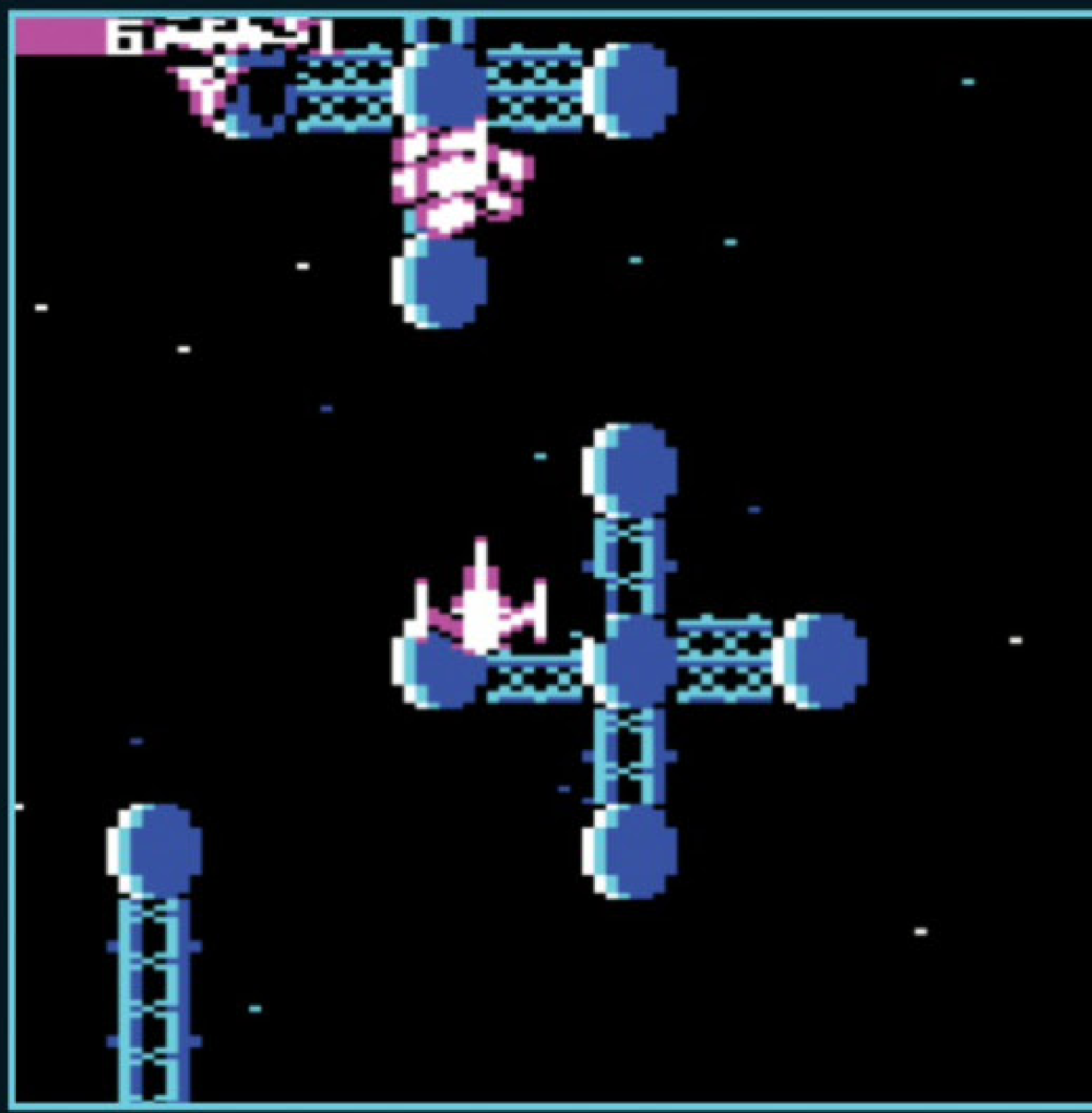
Even if *FireTrack* doesn't quite reach Wagnerian levels of grandeur, it's a wonderfully well-orchestrated shooter for the BBC Micro, full of deft touches to compliment the solid blasting at its core. The way your ship peels off from the flotilla at the start of each assault, the shadows delicately cast onto the detailed landscapes below and the multitude of bonuses scattered across levels for those determined high scoring completists, are all a testament to Nick's lofty and attentive design.

As you swoop over extensive landscapes, designed by Nick's friend Ian 'Boff' Boffin, your ship constantly spews out bullets without the need to keep the fire button pressed down. Fleets of foes stand between you and the nuclear power generator, ominously resembling a giant robotic face, situated at the climax of each world. There are the giant croissants, ninja pretzels with their spinning shuriken-style and indestructible dumbbells. Well, that's what we think they look like. Have we named the enemies correctly, Nick? "Pretty much," he winks. "Even though I was coming from a *Star Force* mindset, what I liked about *FireTrack* was the way that the patterns worked. At first, enemies come down in zigzags or loop patterns, but as the game progresses, these patterns get slowly deconstructed. I found that very hypnotic."

One of the game's strengths is the way in which the difficulty slowly ramps up. At first, enemy ships don't fire, instead relying on suicidal sorties into your flightpath. Then exploding stars start floating across your route, soon joined by clouds of deadly bullets. Next comes the mixing of patterns, with differing enemies banding together in confusing and unpredictable formations, meaning no longer can you take up a position safe in the knowledge that the assault pattern will lead foes into your deadly spray of bullets.

"Do you remember New Order's *Blue Monday*?" Nick asks, "with all those remixes bringing elements in and out and stretching them out in a long, hypnotic kind of way? Well, it's kind of like that. It's part of that era."

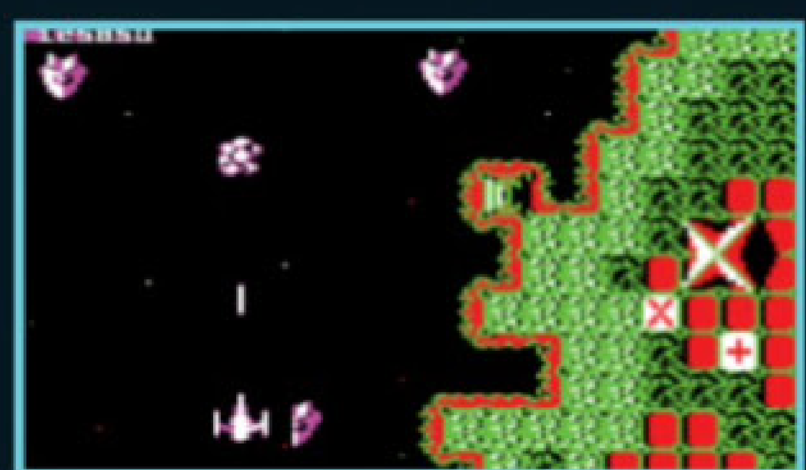
We reminisce about those memorable 12 inches from the Eighties and also about *FireTrack*'s strikingly garish colour scheme, which meant the game was as challenging to the eyes as it was the fingers. Nick blames the BBC Micro's limited colour palette, though when he converted the game to the Commodore 64, he retained the odd colour combinations, the distinctive look, which helped it stand out from the slew of shooters on that machine. Though he didn't start the port until the BBC version of the game was almost complete, we assume that the



» [BBC Micro] The dazzling colour scheme might have been down to the limitations of the BBC's colour palate but it made a change from more sombre blasters.



» [C64] There were plenty of shooters on the C64 so Nick certainly had his work cut out.



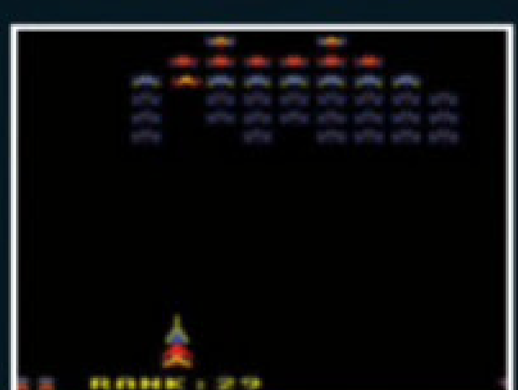
» [C64] We like the ship design, it reminds us of a cross between a X-Wing and a Colonial Viper.



» You'll spot Nick in the documentary *From Bedrooms To Billions*, eulogising about the elegance of the BBC Micro.

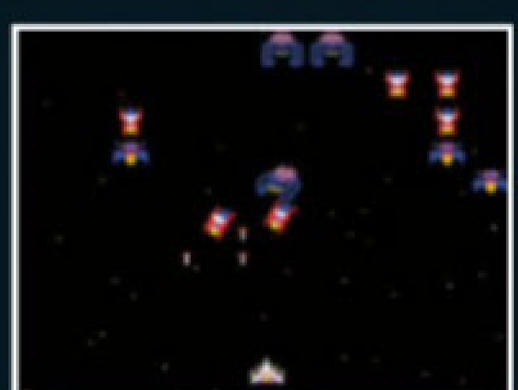
ORLANDO BLOOMS

Nick's other BBC gems



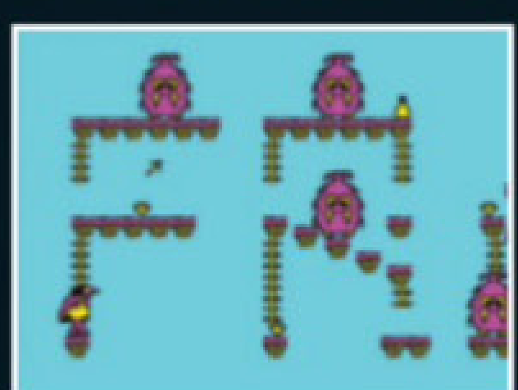
ARCADIANS 1982

■ Acornsoft had a rather excellent reputation for producing superior arcade clones in the early Eighties and Nick's take on *Galaxian* is a decent shooter. The speed and convincing alien swooping make this very playable, though the size of your ship make it frustratingly tough.



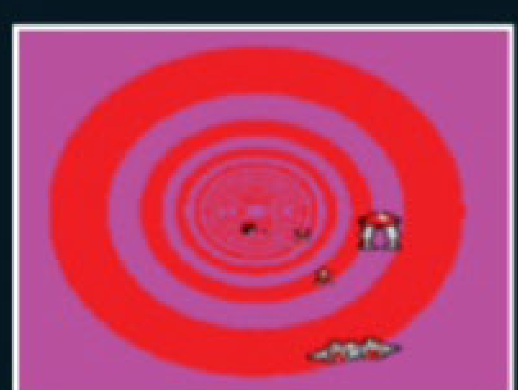
ZALAGA 1983

■ Considering Nick only played the *Galaga* coin-op a few times in Norway before heading home and producing his own version, this is surprisingly faithful to the original, featuring graceful attack patterns, the ability to pair your ships for added firepower and bonus 'Challenge Stages'.



FRAK! 1984

■ This endearing tale of rotund caveman Trogg leaping between precarious platforms, dispatching extras from '*Where The Wild Things Are*' with nothing more than a primitive yo-yo, is probably Nick's best-loved title and quite rightly so. Its quintessentially British and, as a result, very lovely.



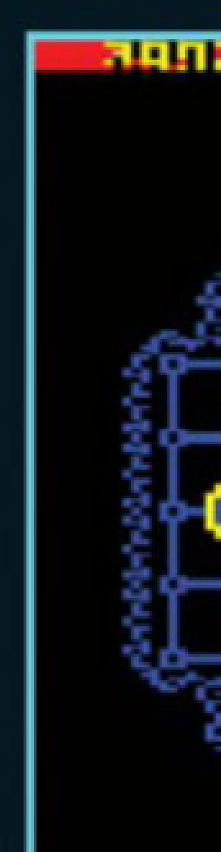
3D WARS 1985

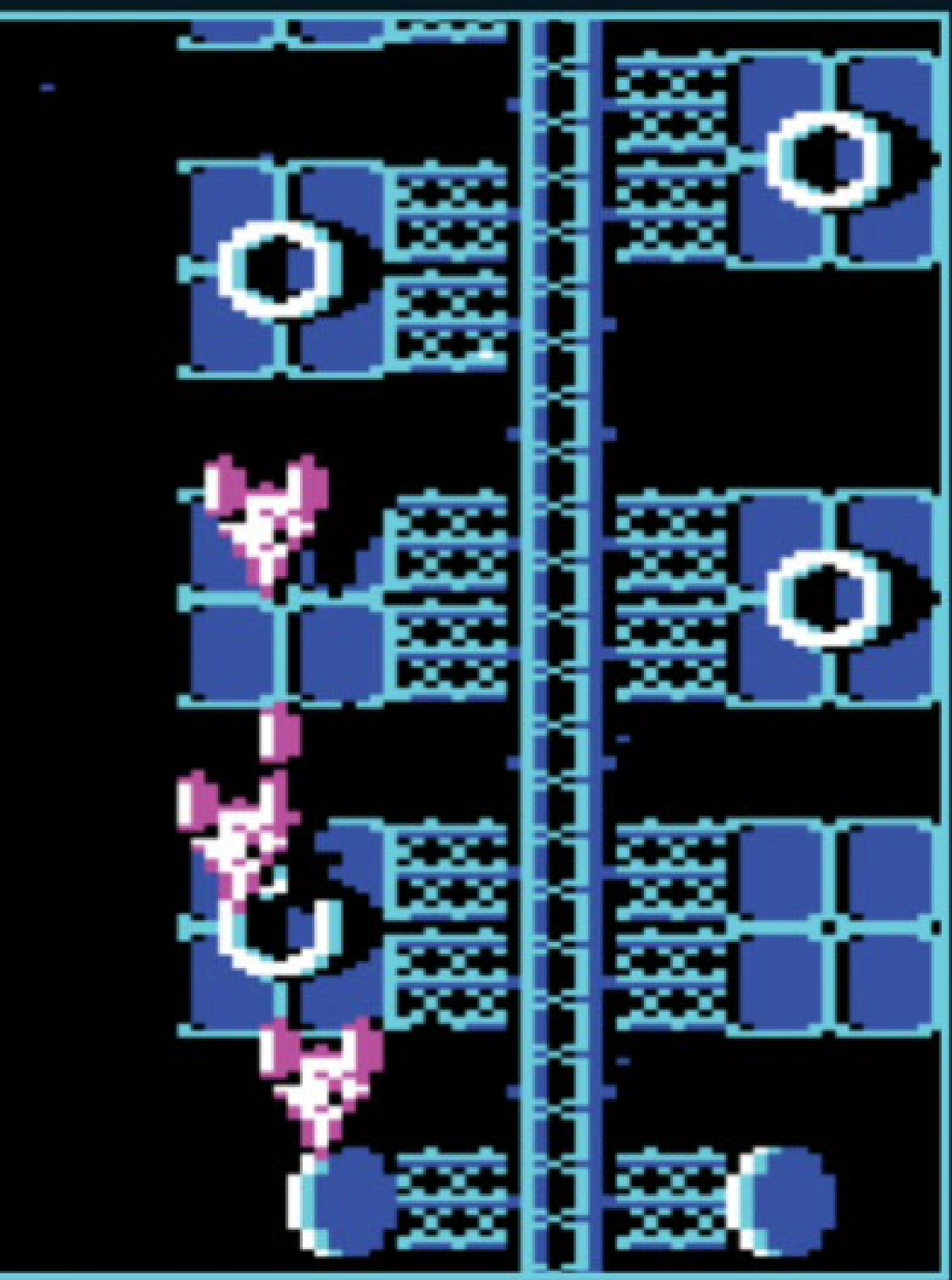
■ Nick admits he left many games unfinished during his early programming days. Sadly, we'll never get to play *Porky PI* or *Malus*, but at least we got a taste of his experiments in three dimensional blasting when this demo appeared on a *Personal Computer Games* covertape.

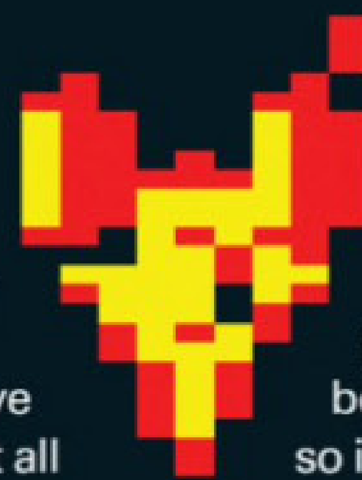


3D POOL 1989

■ More of Nick's adventures in the third dimension, this time round it was a technically impressive take on the sport of a misspent youth. Released near the end of the BBC Micro's commercial life, the game only received a limited distribution, making it one of the machine's rarer titles.







C64's hardware, particularly scrolling, made the process less problematic.

"Oh there were lots of other difficulties," interrupts Nick. "Sprite glitching, for a start. The C64 only has eight sprites and you have to work quite hard to multiplex anything beyond that. People like the Sensible Software guys had written multiplexing engines, but in practice you can't do it perfectly unless you design your game specifically and I was coming from a different mindset. I had to use a very general purpose routine and it wasn't perfect. Then there was the extraordinary effort I went to compress all the levels [so it was a single load]. There were five or six levels of compression and there was an awesome level of development difficulty in doing that."

Nick's effort clearly showed in the results, though. The BBC Micro version remains one of its best blasters and *Zzap!64* awarded the C64 release an impressive 88% in their April 1987 edition. Yet despite press acclaim, *FireTrack* sold poorly. Publishers Electric Dreams failed to promote the game, instead focussing on the similarly titled *Fire Trap*, which it confusingly released the same year. Nick then discovered his agent, Jackie Lyons, who had signed the deal, was also receiving money from Electric Dreams, meaning he had no one to really fight his corner. "That soured the experience," admits Nick. "I've always liked the game, it was just all the stuff around it. If you were going to do a deconstructing, operatic, aspirational, vertical scrolling shooty space game on the BBC, that's kind of how it would turn out. Put all the conceptual pieces in the mix, *FireTrack* is what you get."

Disappointing sales and the unpleasant dealings with Electric Dreams meant Nick never worked on the sequel alluded to at the end of the game. Successfully battle through all eight worlds and you receive a message explaining the 'Pirate Industrials' you've been blasting have opened up a vortex, sucking you into another dimension, closing with the promise of '*FireTrack 2: Beyond the White Hole* – the story continues…'

"It was going to have more exotic worlds and this funky parallax scrolling thing," says Nick, wistfully. "As you went left and right, your perspective on the land below would change slightly so it felt like you were swaying about and stuff. Only you and Boff know about that!"

And now you do too, dear readers. Nick continued in the videogames business for many more years, working on such diverse titles as *The X-Files* and *Duke Nukem*, and even though he's been out of games programming for a while now, we wonder whether he might ever consider revisiting *FireTrack*, perhaps letting us swing our pants to that sequel on mobile devices?

"It would be nice one day," Nick agrees, "but to succeed as a programmer in the world of freemium games you need aggressive marketing. You need to be four parts Bruce Everiss to one part Matthew Smith."

Nick, if you ever do remake *FireTrack*, promise to make that the end of level boss. *

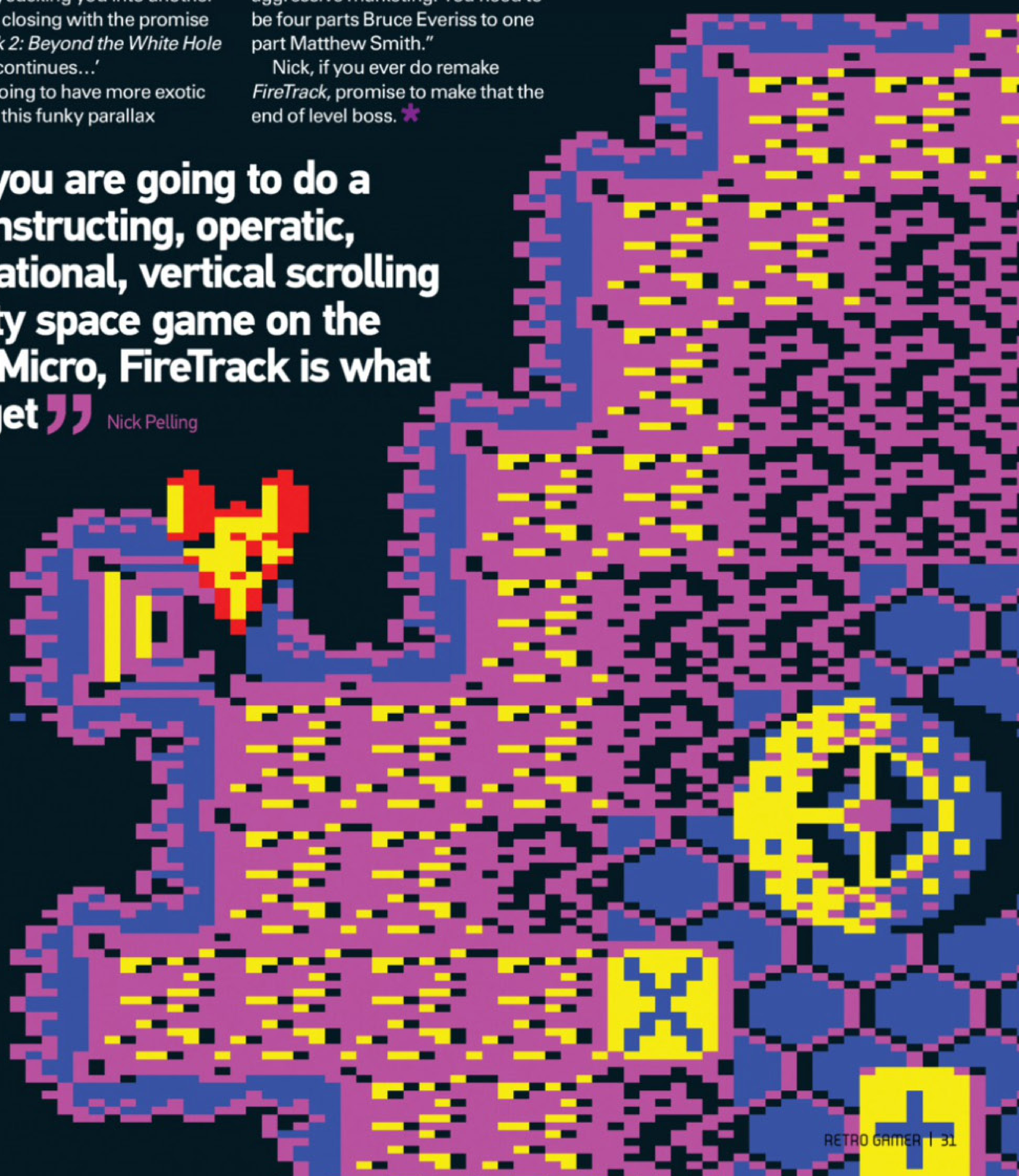


» [C64] The Commodore 64 version received decent reviews. *Zzap!64* loved it, awarding it 88%.



» [C64] The colour scheme isn't the best but it's still easier on the eyes than the BBC original.

"If you are going to do a deconstructing, operatic, aspirational, vertical scrolling shooty space game on the BBC Micro, FireTrack is what you get" Nick Pelling



» [BBC Micro] We love the little touches in *FireTrack*, from the shadows cast by the ships to the intricate geometric structures on the surface.



Magnavox

ODYSSEY

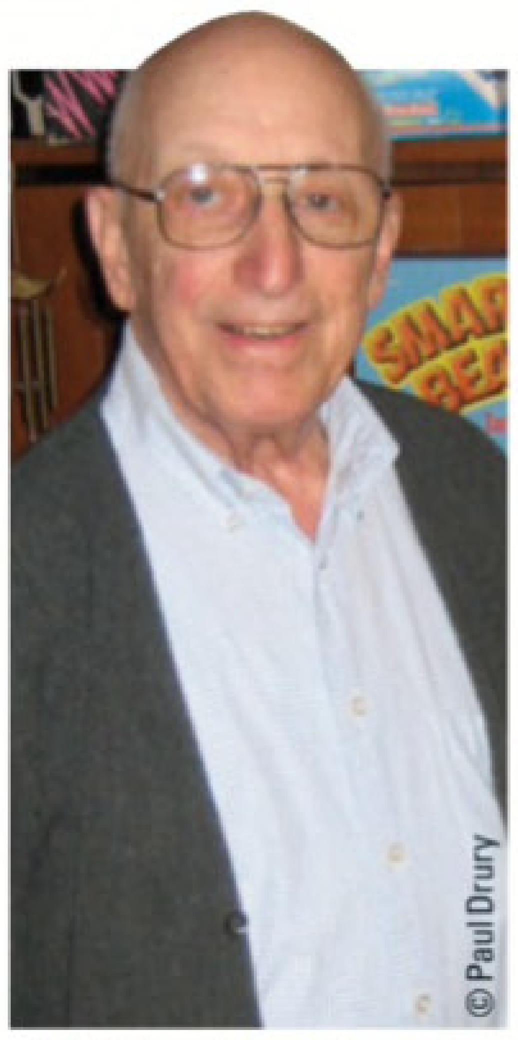
GAMING STARTED HERE



Released in August 1972, the Magnavox Odyssey introduced the concept of turning your television set into an interactive gaming device. Marty Goldberg takes you on a journey to discover the story behind the very first commercial videogame console

To boldly go where no man has gone before. When those words were uttered on American television screens during the debut of *Star Trek* in September 1966, viewers in living rooms across the country had no idea just how true those words were to become. Within the span of a few short years, their television sets would be doing just that thanks to the nondescript team of electrical engineers working away in Nashua, New Hampshire. Lead by 44-year-old Ralph Baer, the group would transform that standard television set into an interactive device, creating an entertainment medium for the home just as transformative as when movies and television shows first started being broadcast into homes. When the team had started its work during that fateful summer that new medium didn't even have a name. It was just a dream of the future, based on an idea Ralph had over a decade before its creation. ▶





» Ralph Baer sadly passed away in December 2014.

In 1950, Ralph Baer was working for defence contractor Loral Electronics Corporation in New York. Just two years before that year he had been the first person in the US to graduate with a Bachelor Of Science in Television Engineering, putting him in an exclusive echelon of engineers in the US which was familiar with this new but quickly spreading entertainment technology.

While working on a high-class projection TV set, the only TV set he'd wind up building over the next two decades, Ralph had an epiphany. The test equipment he was working with electronically created lines and checkerboard patterns on the screen. He started to muse, what if the circuitry could be expanded into a game on the TV, and maybe even be built into the set? What if a TV set could be used for something *other* than watching broadcast shows?

The bright idea he had come up with would help launch an entertainment medium that itself wound up becoming a multi-billion dollar industry decades later. In a perfect world where everyone shared Ralph's vision, kids growing up in the Fifties would have been able to switch over from *Howdy Doody* to play a game with their friends on Saturday morning.

But that was not to be, thanks to chief engineer Sam Lackoff. Being a 28-year-old engineer very low on the corporate totem pole meant that Ralph's vision lost out to Sam's senior project management blinders. Ralph was told that his projection TV project was behind schedule and he should stop wasting time. And after that project was done, Ralph had to move on from one defense contract after the next, which is what he remained in for the next few decades. During the next 16 years, though, he eventually rose to the rank of chief engineer at Loral and then a VP for engineering at Transitron and then, finally, division manager at Sanders Associates. That's where he was when the next part of his journey took place.

In late August 1966, Ralph was enjoying a sunny day on the steps of a bus terminal. On a business trip for Sanders, the tardiness of another engineer forced Ralph to do what most talented engineers do: dream up new ideas for circuits. Only in this case he harked back to his doomed idea from back in 1951, the one he never quite lost hope in pursuing. Ralph started doodling notes for his plan to use ordinary home TV sets to play electronic games. By the time the other engineer was done, Ralph had the feeling he was on to something.

When he got back to his office at Sanders on 1 September 1966 Ralph took his notes and created a four-page document that outlined his plan for turning a standard TV into an interactive gaming device. Within that document was a description that included how the TV itself would interface with a 'box' that would cost around $25. In turn, it would play games – ideas for these were also sketched out and spanned the categories of action, artistic, instructional, board, card, sports and 'game monitoring' (which had the 'box' unit

> While working on a high-class projection TV set, Ralph had an ephinany. What if the circuitry could be expanded into a game on the TV?

functioning like a pair dice used in games like *Dungeons & Dragons*). It was the idea of the technology to interface with a TV for playing these games that was where the groundbreaking magic happened.

Long before today's wall of various digital inputs on the back of our HDTVs, in 1966 the only way to get into a TV (which at that time was analog) was through its antennas. Unlike the vector and dot displays available to big university computers of the time period (which allowed the computer direct control of the display like an etch-a-sketch), to interface with a TV, your device had to generate a coded video signal which was in turn decoded by the normal TV circuitry to 'draw' a single frame on the screen (usually at a rate of 24 of these a second). Each of those frames was constructed by lines and lines of pixels, drawn left to right one horizontal row at a time until the screen was filled. The video signal was ▶

BATTERY COMPARTMENT

An optional power supply was available, but most owners ran it with batteries. six 'C' batteries to be precise, which came with the unit.





» The Magnavox Odyssey, shipped with a number of different games for its 1972 release.



» This dial is used to centre the vertical line of the TV screen.

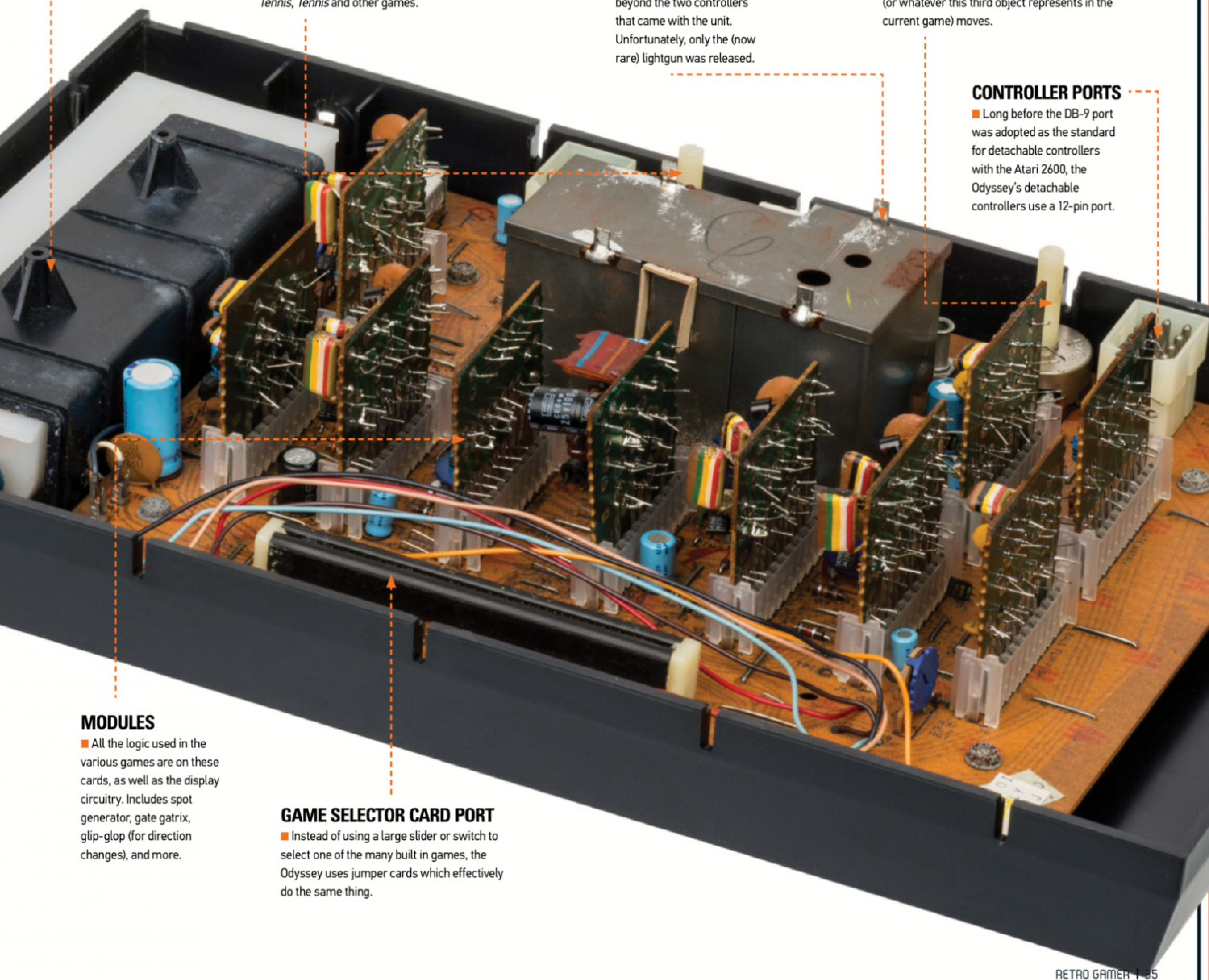






INSIDE THE MAGNAVOX ODYSSEY

The bits and pieces that powered Ralph's console



CENTRE ADJUSTMENT

Used to adjust the position of the vertical mid-screen line on the television, used in *Table Tennis*, *Tennis* and other games.

ACCESSORY PORT

The Odyssey has a built-in port to connect accessories beyond the two controllers that came with the unit. Unfortunately, only the (now rare) lightgun was released.

SPEED ADJUSTMENT

Unlike later *Pong*-only consoles, the Odyssey allows you to adjust how fast the ball (or whatever this third object represents in the current game) moves.

CONTROLLER PORTS

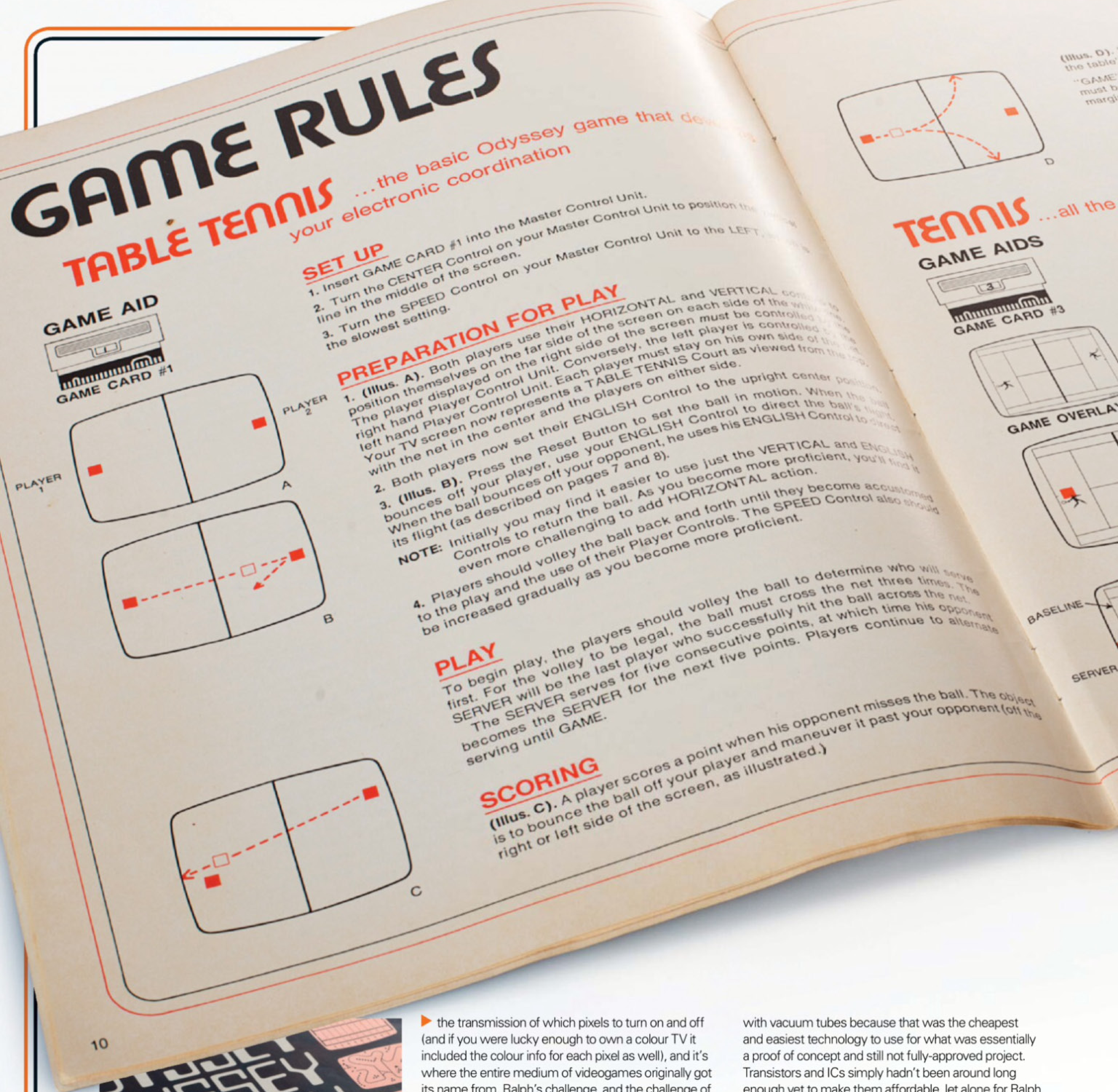
Long before the DB-9 port was adopted as the standard for detachable controllers with the Atari 2600, the Odyssey's detachable controllers use a 12-pin port.

MODULES

All the logic used in the various games are on these cards, as well as the display circuitry. Includes spot generator, gate gatrix, glip-glop (for direction changes), and more.

GAME SELECTOR CARD PORT

Instead of using a large slider or switch to select one of the many built in games, the Odyssey uses jumper cards which effectively do the same thing.

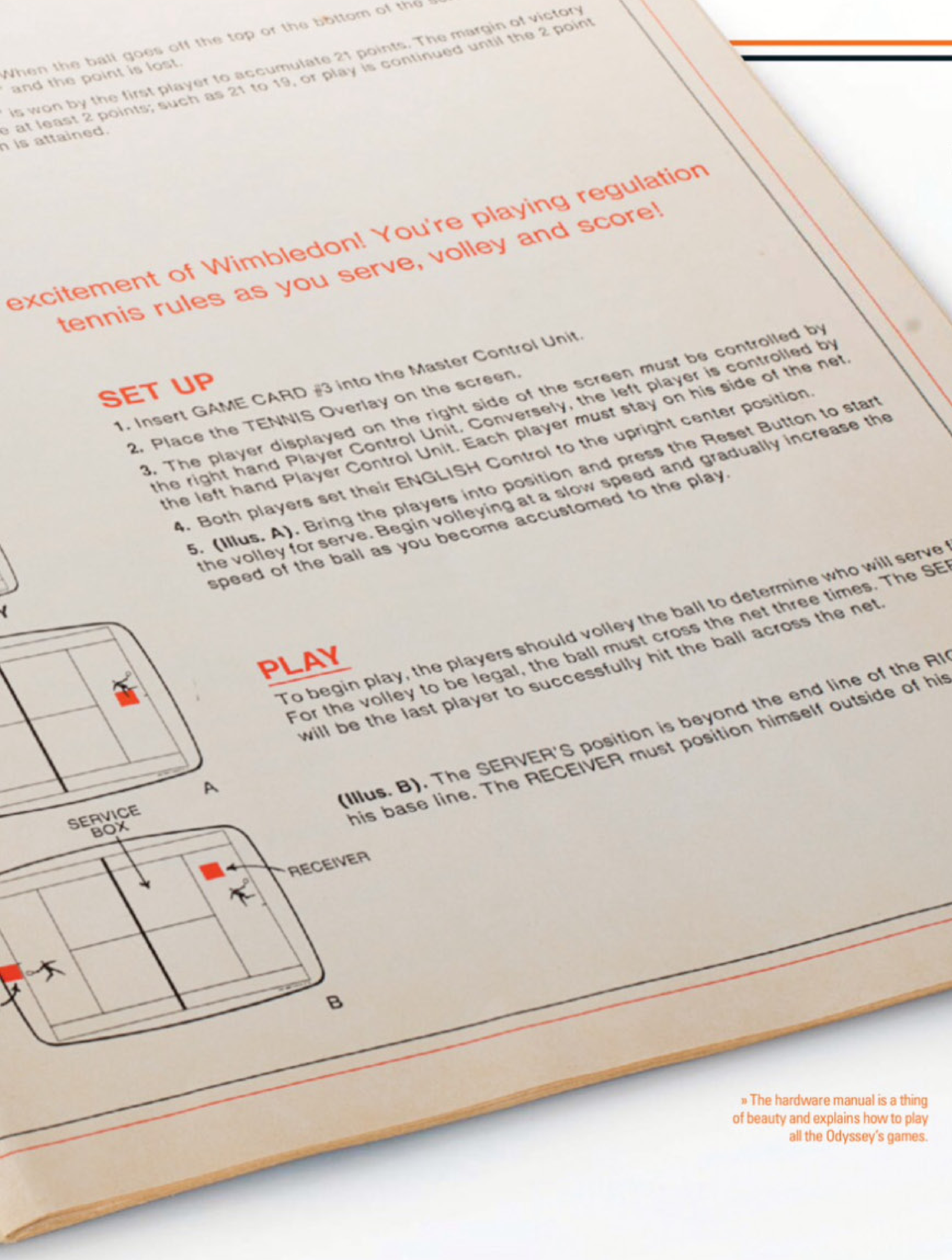




the transmission of which pixels to turn on and off (and if you were lucky enough to own a colour TV it included the colour info for each pixel as well), and it's where the entire medium of videogames originally got its name from. Ralph's challenge, and the challenge of anyone attempting to interface with a video display at that time, was to get basic objects onto this relatively one dimensional display and make them appear to be moving around at the will of the players. Referred to as a spot motion circuit, it was the basis for videogames in the home and arcades for many years to come – though Ted Dabney would wind up inventing his and Nolan Bushnell's spot motion circuitry in 1970, completely independent of Ralph's work.

By 6 September 1966 Ralph had the initial schematics laid out for a spot motion circuit and was assigned a technician by the name of Bob Tremblay to build and test it. Called 'TV Game Unit 1', it was built with vacuum tubes because that was the cheapest and easiest technology to use for what was essentially a proof of concept and still not fully-approved project. Transistors and ICs simply hadn't been around long enough yet to make them affordable, let alone for Ralph to have worked with them much. In December 1966 Ralph demonstrated it to corporate director of research and development, Herbert Chapman. Herbert found some some potential and gave Ralph the green light and funding to pursue his project further.

Ralph and one of his engineers, by the name of Bob Solomon, began planning out the games and how to take advantage of colour in the games they were going to display in a new 19-inch colour TV. Yes, Ralph's plan was for a full-colour game system. By early 1967 Ralph was working on a transistorised version and he brought in another technician by the name of Bill Harrison (who was already known for his work in transistorised



» The hardware manual is a thing of beauty and explains how to play all the Odyssey's games.

> Ralph's challenge was to get basic objects on to this relatively one dimensional display and make them appear to be moving around at the will of the players

circuits) to replace the now departed Bob Tremblay. Working in the small 10-by-20 foot lab, they started working on a 'light pen' for the game unit for use in playing quiz games. Coming up with a novel way of generating coded spots, the two eventually expanded it into the first video-based lightgun and, in turn, their first interactive video patent. With other work at Sanders taking higher priority at times, the work on this video entertainment system wasn't continuous, but it did move forward in leaps and bounds regardless. Ralph continued to lay out more game ideas including maze games, racing games, baseball games, and more.

By the middle of June 1967 they had TV Game Unit 2 completed. Looking like a metal box with a bunch of knobs and pump controls, the unit played a pumping game (where the object was for each play to pump water to the other person's area), a bucket filling game, *Chess*, *Steeple Chase*, *Fox And Hounds*, *Colour*

EARLY GAMES

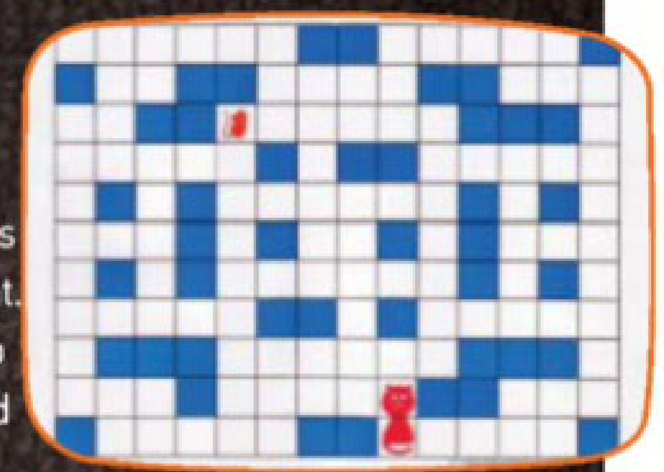
Five releases that moulded the Odyssey

TENNIS



The game that started it all. Nolan Bushnell saw this game at a demo of the Odyssey and gave Al Alcorn the challenge to create a version of it as a warm-up. Al created a simplified version known as *Pong*. The original used the Odyssey's controls to provide horizontal and vertical motion, too.

CAT & MOUSE



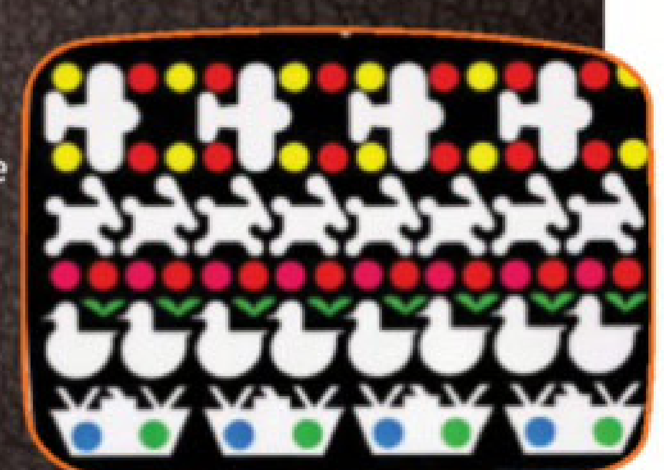
The first maze chase videogame. One player is a cat and the other a mouse. Cat chases mouse. Cat catches mouse. Cat easts mouse. There's not much more to it than that. The maze itself only exists on the overlay, so you're really on the honour system to try and keep your blocks in the lines.

HAUNTED HOUSE



One of the more fun two-player games on the Odyssey, it's basically a half-card/half-videogame set in a haunted house. You play a detective that has has to move from clue to clue to get to a treasure. Your opponent is a ghost that's hidden until the right moment and then, boo!

SHOOTING GALLERY



In this game which utilised the groundbreaking lightgun peripheral, you use the lightgun to shoot your square bouncing back and forth lighting up targets in the overlay. Once you hit it ten times in one row, you move the light down to the next row to go back and forth, and so on.

HOCKEY



Yes, long before the Sega Mega Drive, the Odyssey was *the* place for sports games. Ok, it was the only place for sports games. You start in the centre against your opponent and try and score a goal. If the puck goes out of bounds, you face off in one of the relevant areas dotted on the field.



Wheel and a target shooting game that used the two lightguns they had built. Also made up were colour transparencies to affix to the TV screen to add more detailed playfield graphics, and circuitry to enable them to sync an audio cassette that would play Ralph's pre-recorded explanations of the games directly through the TV speaker for the eventual demo to the higher-ups. It was a success and work began on TV Games Unit 3, and the two were joined by an engineer by the name of Bill Rusch as they looked to improve and modularise the circuitry from Unit 2 and come up with more games. They even looked at using 7400 TTL chip (Transistor-Transistor Logic, a digital logic chipset that because the base of most early video arcade games), but it was deemed to expensive. TV Game Unit 3 got the missing colour circuitry to play full colour games, and an important addition by Bill Rusch: a third 'spot' for the machine itself to move around. Rusch came up with the idea of using the spot as a ball for sports games like like *Tennis*, *Ping Pong*, *Soccer*, *Handball* and *Hockey*. It was the birth of what would become known as 'ball and paddle' or *Pong*-style games, and was completed by November 1967. With the addition of circuitry design by Harrison to make the spots rounded instead of square and the inclusion of two joysticks and a set of horizontal, vertical, and 'english' motion knobs, TV Game Unit 4 was born. That soon evolved into TV Game Unit 5 with the addition of de/dt circuitry to get more realistic motion and a focus on moving towards production, and after an eight month hiatus work on TV Game Unit 6 was started with the addition of a rotary switch. This finally lead towards a final reworking of the entire unit into TV Game Unit 7, which is more commonly known as the famous Brown Box.



Starting in January 1969, Sanders started shopping around its finished TV game unit to various television manufacturers in the hope they were the obvious choice for someone to license the technology to and get it on the market. RCA, Motorola, GE, Zenith, Sylvania, GE, Motorola, and Magnavox all took a look at the unit, but RCA was the only one to bite. That was until negotiations fell apart that summer. The chances for the game unit almost died there if it hadn't of been for former RCA marketing team member Bill Enders, who had left and joined up as VP of marketing at Magnavox. Getting Magnavox to reconsider, it took until March 1970 for an agreement to be reached and then until January 1971 for a licensing agreement to be signed.

Unfortunately, during the move from the Brown Box prototype to the final Magnavox product, several of the team's innovations were dropped by Magnavox in favour of cost savings. The colour circuitry was first to go (for a savings of $1.64), then the pumping game controls, the rounded ball circuitry and more. Many of the games were pulled as well, for inclusion in a proposed later unit, though a few new ones were added

MORE MAGNAVOX

The odyssey of the odyssey

After the Odyssey and due to the popularity of *Pong* in the arcade, Magnavox released a set of *Pong*-only consoles in 1975 at the same time that Atari's home *Pong* debuted. Establishing the Odyssey as a brand name for all its consoles in the US (parent Philips used Videopac), it continued releasing a series of *Pong* related consoles until 1978's followup to the original Odyssey, the Odyssey 2 (called the G7000 by Philips). The followup to the O2 never materialised in the US due to the industry crash, however it was released under Philips as the G7400 – its last console until the CD-i.

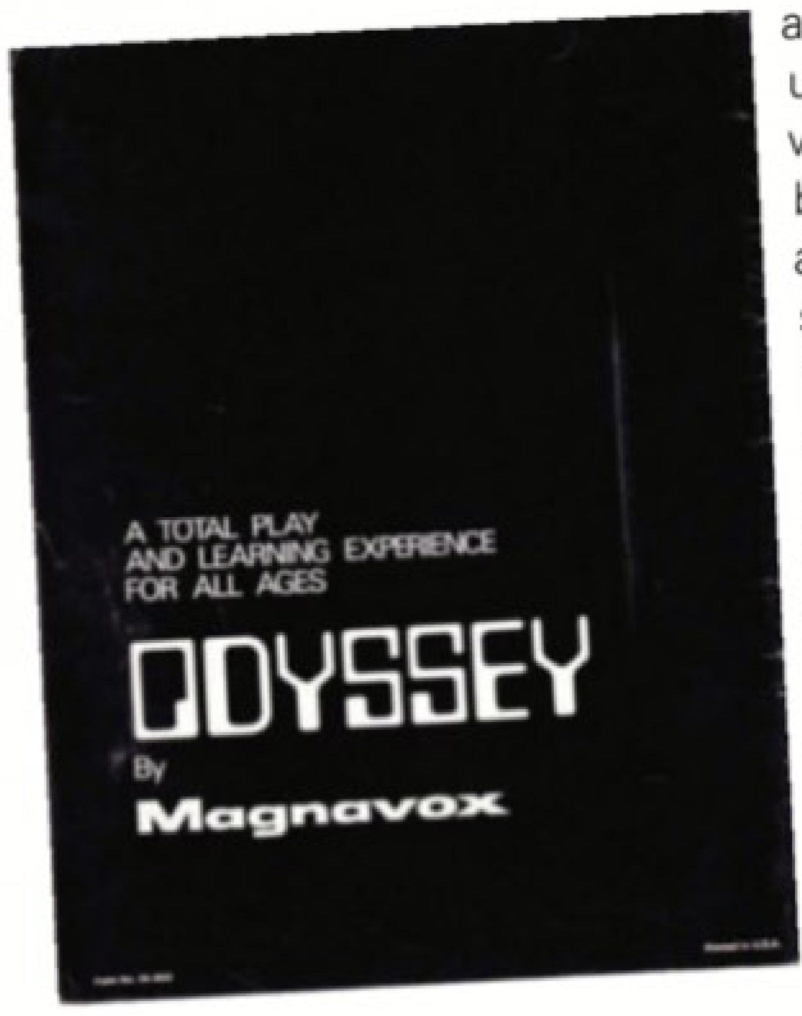








» The controller is rather unwieldy to use now, but this was cutting-edge back in 1972.



as well. Plus, Magnavox's engineers also came up with replacing the 16-game selection switch with cards instead, allowing the user to select a built-in game by plugging in its respective card to activate it. Named Skill-O-Vision at this point, the system was test marketed from July to October 1971 in San Diego, California and Grand Rapids, Michigan to quite favourable reviews. A follow-up appearance in Magnavox's 'Profit Caravan' tour of Magnavox dealers in 22 states in the US also was well-received. Enough so that a May 1972 public introduction of the system was planned, at which point it was christened the Magnavox Odyssey.

When the May 1972 edition of the Profit Caravan rolled into town in Burlingame, California, amongst the crowd of onlookers was a young engineer from a coin operated game company by the name of Nutting Associates, Nolan Bushnell. Having released the first coin-operated videogame the fall of the previous year, Nolan was looking to split off from Nutting with his partner Ted Dabney and had come to the demonstration to see what this first videogame unit for the home was all about. Bushnell took two things from the event. First was that he felt it was a poorly executed 'analog' system, and second that the included *Tennis* game was promising if it could be tweaked. With regards to the former, the context of the later patent trial between Magnavox and Atari has to be taken into account. While the attempt was made to portray the Odyssey as a then outdated analog system compared to Atari's 'fully digital' arcade game, *Pong*, it's not based in fact according to Ralph and the other Sanders engineers. As Ralph explained to us: "One look at the schematics of our last three designs (including the Brown Box which became the Odyssey game) shows that the circuitry is nearly all digital and pulse circuitry, except for the modulator-ch 3/4 oscillator and the sync generators. There is a set-reset-flip-flop for ball reversal upon coincidence with the paddle. Another S-R F-F reverses the ball upon coincidence with the wall in Handball. All coincidence detection is done by diode AND-gates. Even the symbol generators are pulse circuits. So much for the 'analog circuits' myth."

> "When talking about the Odyssey's sales figures, you have to keep in mind this was the first games console"



System supplied by The National Videogame Arcade, gamecity.org

For the latter, Atari's Al Alcorn-created *Pong* actually did create a superior version of the game thanks to Alcorn's clever method of using a single spinner to provide a similar 'english' motion experience. And as Ralph admitted, it drove sales of the Odyssey for Magnavox considering during the time that the system was on the market from 1972-1975 it was the only way you could experience a *Pong* game in the home.

When talking about the Odyssey's sales figures, you have to keep in mind this was the first game console. So you really can't call it a failure by comparing it to other later game consoles, since each later generation continuously pushed the bounds of sales heights in the market. What is known is that sales in 1972 drove a run of 130,000 units that year which is a lot for new technology in that time period.

Remember, this is several years before even the most ubiquitous television device of the next two decades, VCRs, were even accepted into the home as well. Combined with the fact of the major recessions in both the US and UK during the Odyssey's prime market years of 1973-1975, the fact that over 330,000 units were manufactured during that time period points to a successful introduction. Enough so that Magnavox had Sanders and Ralph create the followup *Pong*-only consoles the Odyssey 100 and 200 which it released in the US in the later half of 1975 alongside Atari's entry into home consoles via Sears with its home *Pong*. The 200 was released in the UK under (then) Magnavox owner Phillips as the Philips Odyssey 200 in 1976.

Then again, who in 1972 would of thought a little idea a young engineer had in 1951 for gaming on a home television set would grow into an over $45 billion dollar worldwide industry by the end of 2014? *



» A gorgeous certification card, which reveals what numbered system you owned.



» The speed button set the speed for the ball and therefore the difficulty for *Table Tennis*.



» These bare boards are a world away from the cartridges that would appear on later consoles.



» There's a rather classic sci-fi look to the Odyssey's logo.

» RETROREVIVAL

Fire Emblem

IF NINTENDO DID THE LORD OF THE RINGS



» GAME BOY ADVANCE
» INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS » 2003

Many people assume that *Fire Emblem* is a simple fantasy re-skin of *Advance Wars.* Those people are wrong.

While it looks similar to the Game Boy Advance game (which is hardly surprising as they're by the same developer) there are many subtle, but important differences between the two games. The first is that *Fire Emblem*, like *Advance Wars*, is a franchise that has been knocking around since the Famicom days, with the first game in the series appearing in Japan in 1990.

Then there's the fact that *Fire Emblem* is a proper RPG with turn-based strategy elements, instead of a strategy game with an okay story tacked on. It has a large number of genuinely fleshed out characters that feel a world away from the caricatures found in the *Advance Wars* series. The characters feel so complete that you actually care about them, which brings us on to one of the other big differences between the two franchises.

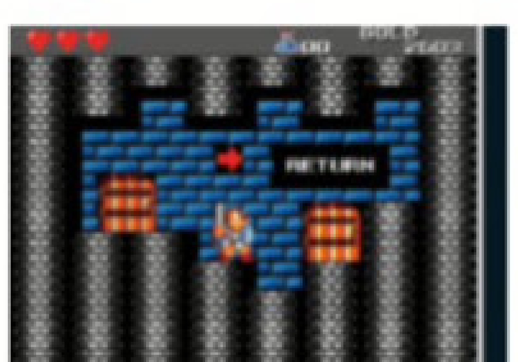
Unlike *Advance Wars*, your characters actually go into battle themselves, and (in most games) when they die, they're dead forever… Admittedly you can restart the chapter and go through the level again, but the inclusion of permadeath makes your bond with each character become that much deeper. You care about the fact that Lyn has lost her parents, and as new characters join her surrogate family, you find yourself doing everything you can to protect them so that you can continue playing with them. It makes you consider every possible move you make, adding an almost *Chess*-like level to the gameplay, as you constantly try to outthink your opponent.

The *Fire Emblem* series may have taken its time to appear in the West, but the wait was certainly worth it, and with prices continually climbing online there's never been a better time to jump on board the franchise. *


Kent
MISS!
Iron sword
HIT 90
DMG 8
CRT 3
20

Wonder Boy III
The Dragon's Trap

After readers declared it to be their favourite Master System game Darran Jones had little choice but to interview Ryuichi Nishizawa about his magnificent adventure



WONDER BOY III: THE DRAGON'S TRAP 101

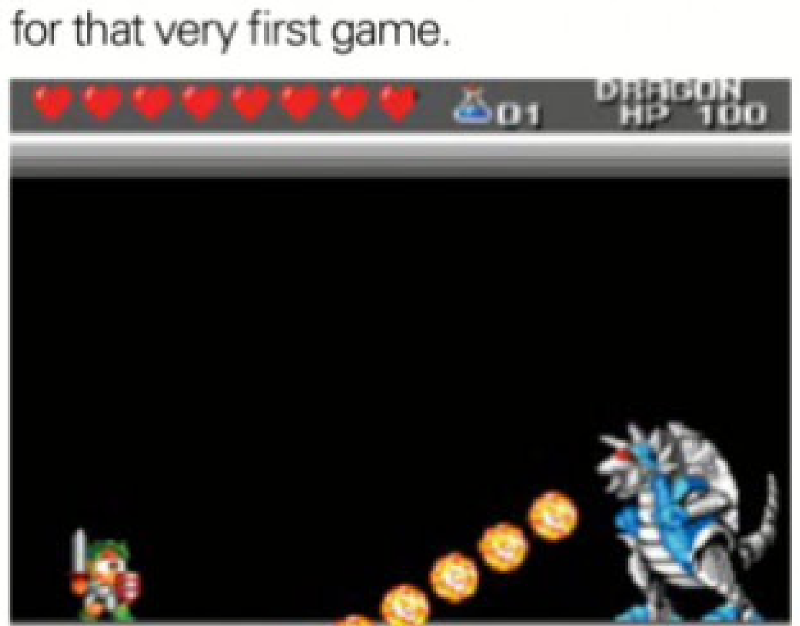
■ For his latest *Wonder Boy* game, Ryuichi Nishizawa decided to take the series to home consoles, in this case, the Sega Master System. The end result is *The Dragon's Trap*, a clever blend of platforming and adventuring that sees hero Tom-Tom facing off against a selection of deadly dragons. Fortunately, the little fella is far from defenceless, being able to transform into a variety of handy animal forms.

Ryuichi Nishizawa isn't the sort of man who likes to rest on his laurels. When he came up with the concept of *Wonder Boy* in 1986 and turned it into a hugely successful platformer he could have eased back and created the same game until gamers took notice and asked for something different. Instead, he evolved the franchise, ensuring that it always played differently, while staying true to the platform structure that had been created for that very first game.

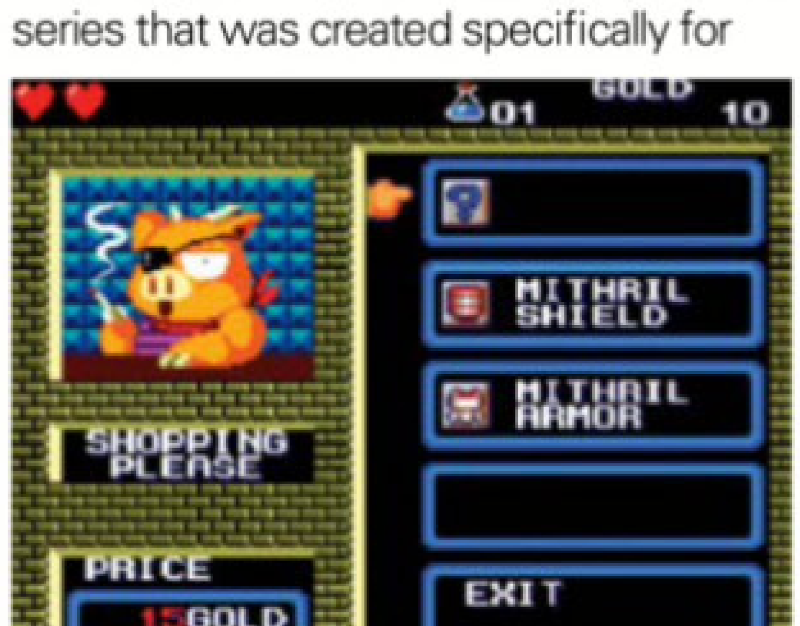
Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap is arguably the best game in the series and a jewel in any Master System owner's collection. While platforming is prevalent, it builds on the RPG-lite mechanics that first appeared in *Wonder Boy In Monster Land*. Unlike the previous two games, which featured separate stages, the sections of *The Dragon's Trap* are linked together to create one world – a world that's full of danger and wonder.

It's worth noting that *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap* is the first game in the series that was created specifically for a home console and that it is a different game to *Wonder Boy III: Monster Lair* that was released in arcades in 1988. While *The Dragon's Trap* is an adventure game that focuses on exploring the environment, *Monster Lair* plays like the original arcade game crossed with a shoot-'em-up. Surely it would have been easy to port the arcade game, as the previous two games had been ported? "I am not interested in ports," explains Nishizawa to us, "I like developing new games. The port development that I've performed myself is only *Monster World II* for Game Gear."

Wanting to create a new *Wonder Boy* game, but uninterested in compromising his vision, Nishizawa turned his attention to Sega's Master System and assembled a team of developers to create what many gamers feel is the console's masterpiece. "The staff was just five people," reveals Nishizawa, "I handled game design and main programming." According to Nishizawa that rest of his team consisted of two additional



» [Master System] The beginning of *The Dragon's Trap* is a lovely touch for those that played its predecessor.



» [Master System] There's a hidden 'Charm Points' system, which controls what shopkeepers will sell you.



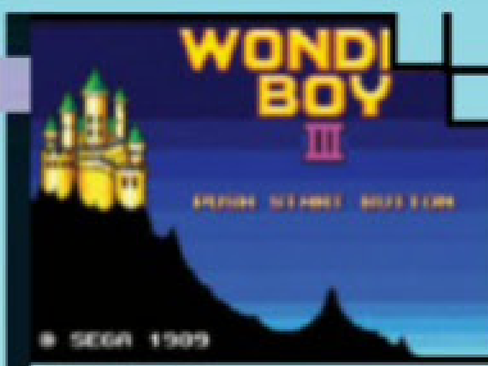
» [Master System] Transformation chambers are hidden throughout the game and let you change form at will.



» [Master System] Chests contain a number of handy items.



» [Master System] Hawk-Man's ability to fly lets him go virtually anywhere.

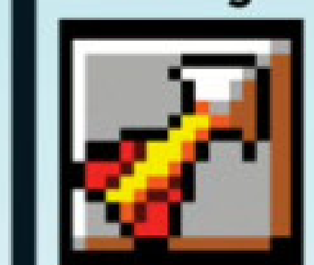


IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** Sega
» **DEVELOPER:** Westone
» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **PLATFORM:** Various
» **GENRE:** Adventure

Power-Up!

Key items to defeat the dragon's trap



ARROW



BOOMERANG



FIREBALL



THUNDER



TORNADO

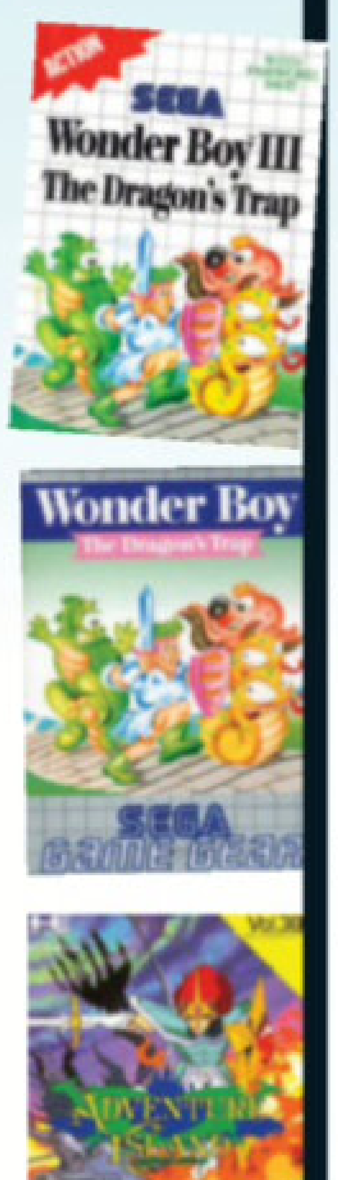
programmers, Takanori Kurihara and Naoki Hoshizaki, Hiromi Suzuko on graphic design and composer, Shinichi Sakamoto. Despite the size of the game and the small team developing it, *The Dragon's Trap* was completed in just ten short months.

While talking about the game's creation we were interested in learning where the idea for *The Dragon's Trap* first originated. Unlike the previous games in the series there are elements of *Metroid* to its structure, a fact Nishizawa was able to confirm to us. "*Metroid* was released in 1986 and *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link* was released in 1987," he begins. "I was a big fan of both of those games, so it was natural that I came under the influence of them." There was an additional game that would greatly inspire the key mechanic of *The Dragon's Trap*, namely the ability to transform into various animals that would in turn open up the huge game world to Tom-Tom, the game's hero. "Whenever I think about the plans of a sequel, I ask the person who is near me, 'what is the game that you are most interested in?' At that time the name Konami's *Wai Wai World* for the Famicom was given to me. [So] I asked the person 'what is it about the game that is interesting?' His reply was: 'The point where a character can transform, and the activity changes.' By the way, I've not actually played it."



"It's a feature of RPGs to knock down a dragon in the last part of the story"
Ryuichi Nishizawa

Although he never played Konami's Famicom game, Nishizawa couldn't get the idea of transforming characters out of his head and he knew that it would form a key part of his new game. With an idea formed he needed some inspiration for where the transformations would come from and how they could be integrated into the story. Lightning struck when Nishizawa came up with the idea of featuring the end of *Wonder Boy In Monster Land*, only to have the defeated dragon leave behind a mean trick that not only transforms you into a beast, but also requires you to escape the castle. It's a great idea and was copied by Konami for *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*'s opening. "I felt that was the most effective way to have as an opening for the sequel,' explains Nishizawa. "Any player who played the previous ▶



»Here's all three pieces of box art for *The Dragon's Trap*. We prefer the Master System one best.





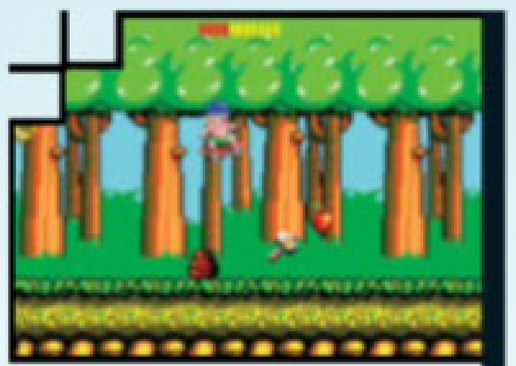
A Mini Adventure

Springing a portable trap

In addition to a PC Engine port, *The Dragon's Trap* was also ported to the Game Gear. Nishizawa explained why it has so many changes to the Master System game. "If I just simply converted it, the displayed area became too small and there was a possibility that the level design would be a failure, thus the game itself would become boring. In other words, to create the Game Gear version (called *Monster World 2*), the simple conversion was not an option and it was necessary to recreate the Level Design. And to do that, I thought it was the quickest if I created it by myself."

As a result Nishizawa restructured the areas Tom-Tom could explore in his guises, designing it so it captivated the player. "Even when the screen size became smaller, it was important that the players should be able to see the treasure box on the other side of the wall and get them to be motivated by making them think, 'What should I do to get that?' So I reorganised the position of the enemies and items in every scene."





DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

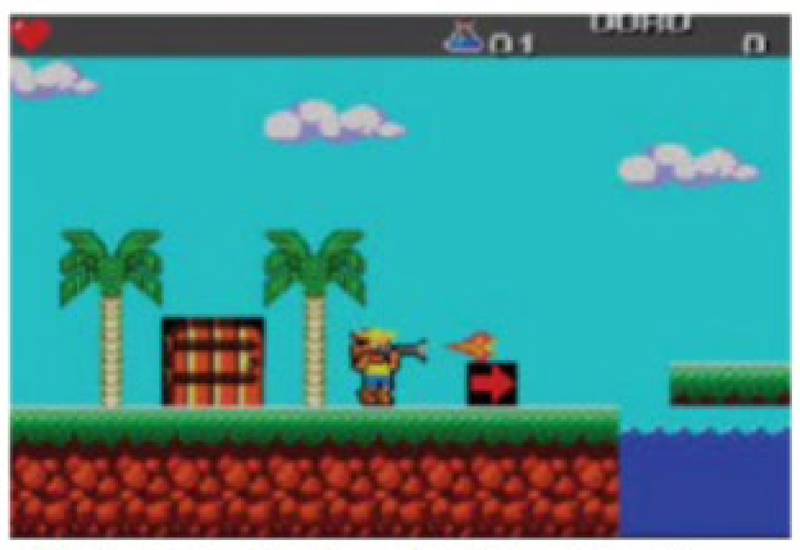
WONDER BOY (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: Arcade
YEAR: 1986

WONDER BOY IN MONSTER LAND
SYSTEM: Arcade
YEAR: 1987

WONDER BOY III: MONSTER LAIR
SYSTEM: Arcade
YEAR: 1988

▶ game would feel the continuity. And if anybody who has not played the previous game would be interested in it."

Equally interesting was the creature design that Nishizawa used for his game. Although you start off as Tom-Tom, other creature forms become available to you. Each animal has its own abilities, which in turn open up the game, allowing you to explore the world further. In addition to Lizard-Man, Mouse-Man can climb walls, Piranha-Man swims, Lion-Man can use his arching sword attack to clear blocks, while Hawk-Man has the power of flight. The structure of *The Dragon's Trap* works similarly to *Metroid*, except that it is new forms and not weapons that enable you to progress through the game. "I designed the [transformations] with the idea of a beast person (therianthropy) in mind. Examples of therianthropy include the Minotaur, mermen, lizard men and lycanthropes. Because they do not appear in myths, Mouse-Man and Hawk-Man are original."Despite having access to a large number of creatures, Nishizawa gave us an emphatic "No!" when we asked him if any creatures had been left out.



» [Master System] Tec Toy replaced the sprites with characters from the Brazilian comic, *Monica's Gang*.

Although *The Dragon's Trap* was created for the Sega Master System, Nishizawa didn't find the limited hardware to be that much of an issue. "Because the design of Sega's arcade board resembled that of the Master System, I did not have that hard of a time programming. Of course, the specifications for the [Master System] were smaller." That's not to say that there weren't problems with the hardware and Nishizawa regrets that he couldn't do more to convey the story of *The Dragon's Trap*, telling us, "because memory was small, I had trouble with expressing the scenes of the adventure with a few pictures." Another issue the team faced was with the controls of Mouse-Man. While all the characters are able to walk, Mouse-Man is the only one who is able to walk up walls or even upside down. It's a neat trick, but is a bit clunky in practice. Nishizawa admits as much, revealing, "it's difficult. It was hard to program without spoiling operability."

It might not have been easy to get Mouse-Man working, but the payoff was huge, instantly making the character stand apart from the rest of *The Dragon's Trap*'s motley crew. While the vast majority of the game is spent as Lizard-Man, the later characters are all giving sections to shine in with, the transformation to Piranha-Man being a particularly noticeable example. While every character bar Hawk-Man can function in water, they're incredibly slow and at the mercy of the sea's many denizens. Piranha-Man has no such issues, being able to move around with ease, turning a once-difficult gauntlet into an exotic, interesting location to explore. When you first start playing *The Dragon's Trap* it initially appears to be quite a basic game with little challenge. The integration of the animals, along with the open world soon makes you realise otherwise, however, and there are many sections where you'll have to repeatedly transform forms in order to navigate some of the more devious areas that the talented team had devised.



» [Master System] As you'd expect, Piranha-Man can move quickly and easily through water.

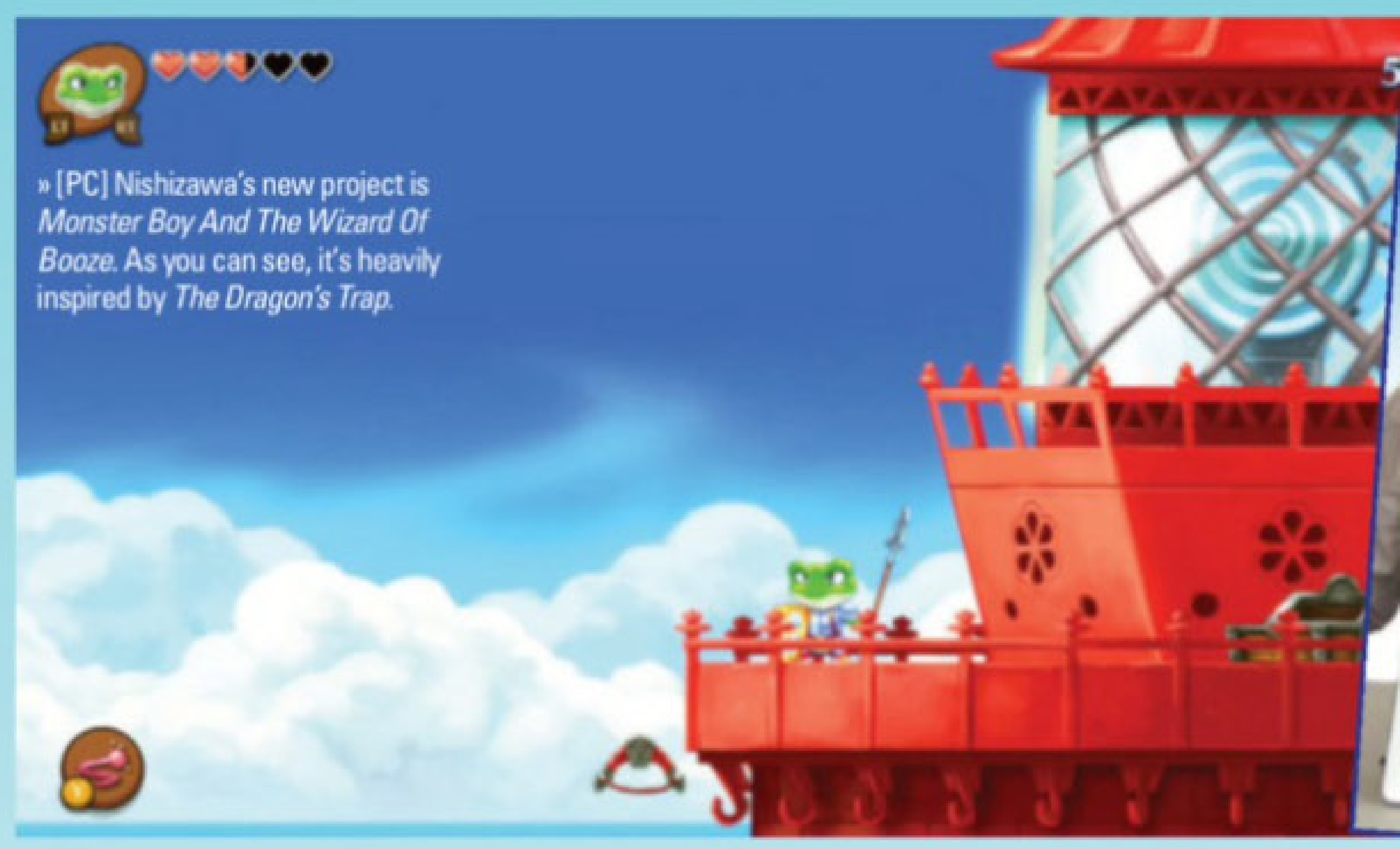


» [PC Engine] While Bock Lee Temjin is his real name, he's also affectionately known as Tom-Tom.

Being an evolution of the series, *The Dragon's Trap* shares numerous similarities with *Monster Land*, including the ability to visit shops that allow you to upgrade your armour, shields and purchase limited use weapons. It's also possible to visit hospitals where you can restore your health. Interestingly, you can no longer purchase alcohol like you could in *Monster Land*. The addition of shops to the series was to simply ensure that anyone could enjoy the game, with Nishizawa revealing, "the player who is [poor] at action games can enjoy it." Nishizawa also has an explanation for why so many of the vendors found in *The Dragon's Trap* are animals. "I just had the designer draw them freely," he admits, going on to say that "the one-eyed pig seems to have high popularity [with fans]."

While the shops were a good way of enabling gamers to progress in the game, they also harked back to the RPG genre. It's particularly apparent when you consider the huge bosses that Tom-Tom must face throughout the course of the game. Each boss takes the form of a large dragon and Tom-Tom must typically use his latest acquired form to defeat it. "It's a feature of RPGs to knock down a dragon in the last part of the story," laughs Nishizawa, "so I wanted to let various dragons come up. My favourite remains the zombie dragon."

Considering its high profile nature and the fact it was created by a Japanese developer, *The Dragon's Trap* wasn't actually released in Japan. Japanese gamers wouldn't experience the popular game until it was ported to the PC Engine and Game Gear, the latter of which was ported by Nishizawa himself. We were keen to know if he was disappointed about the absence of the Master System version in Japan. "I think the most disappointed person was Mr Sakamoto who was the composer of the game," reveals Nishizawa. "He worked hard to get them to work on both PSG sound source and FM sound source and yet the Master System, which was released in North America, did not even have FM system unit installed." Anyone who has ever heard any FM-based Master System soundtracks will know about Sakamoto's lament, so it's a pity that the soundtrack (which is still good) wasn't as epic as the composer had originally intended.



» [PC] Nishizawa's new project is *Monster Boy And The Wizard Of Booze*. As you can see, it's heavily inspired by *The Dragon's Trap*.



"I am not interested in port development, I just like developing new games"
Ryuichi Nishizawa

Despite this reservation, Nishizawa is still pleased with the game his team created and is equally pleased that it remains so fondly loved by so many gamers today. It's arguable that the popularity of *The Dragon's Trap* is one of the main reasons why Nishizawa's new game, *Monster Boy And The Wizard Of Booze* proved to be so popular on Kickstarter recently, and it's no coincidence that it shares so many similarities, both aesthetically and mechanically, with his hit Master System game. "I think the biggest charm of the game is what it allows the player to imagine," concludes Nishizawa. "If you let imagination act, you can see it anytime." *

Thar be dragons! The bosses that like springing traps

MECHA DRAGON



■ The very first dragon you encounter was the final boss of *Wonder Boy In Monster Land*. Despite his fearsome appearance, he goes down easily if you administer some sharp blows to the head.

ZOMBIE DRAGON



■ Nishizawa's favourite dragon is a painfully shy boss, choosing to disappear under the ground in the hope that he'll catch you unawares. When he does appear he hammers you with an endless stream of projectiles.

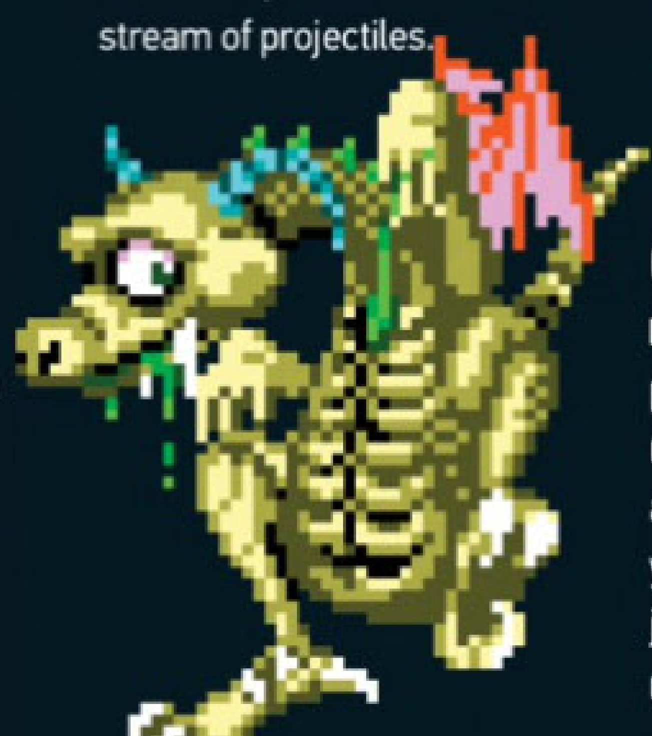
DAIMYO DRAGON



■ Lion-Man may have an impressive sword, but Daiymo Dragon's is even longer. Avoid the multiple blue projectiles he fires at you and watch out for his great reach. His parting gift turns you into Hawk-Man.



MUMMY DRAGON



■ The second boss will turn you into Mouse-Man. Before that happens, you'll need to avoid the green goo he spits out and hit him in his fleshy proboscis whenever the opportunity arises.

CAPTAIN DRAGON



■ This guy hides in a sunken pirate ship that can only be reached by Piranha-Man. He's a tough boss, firing hooks at you and using an off-putting jump. As always, hitting his nose will cause his defeat.

VAMPIRE DRAGON

■ Unsurprisingly, the final boss is also the toughest that you face. This is mainly due to his erratic flight patterns, which often require you to fly in order to reach him. Stab him in his gut to win.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

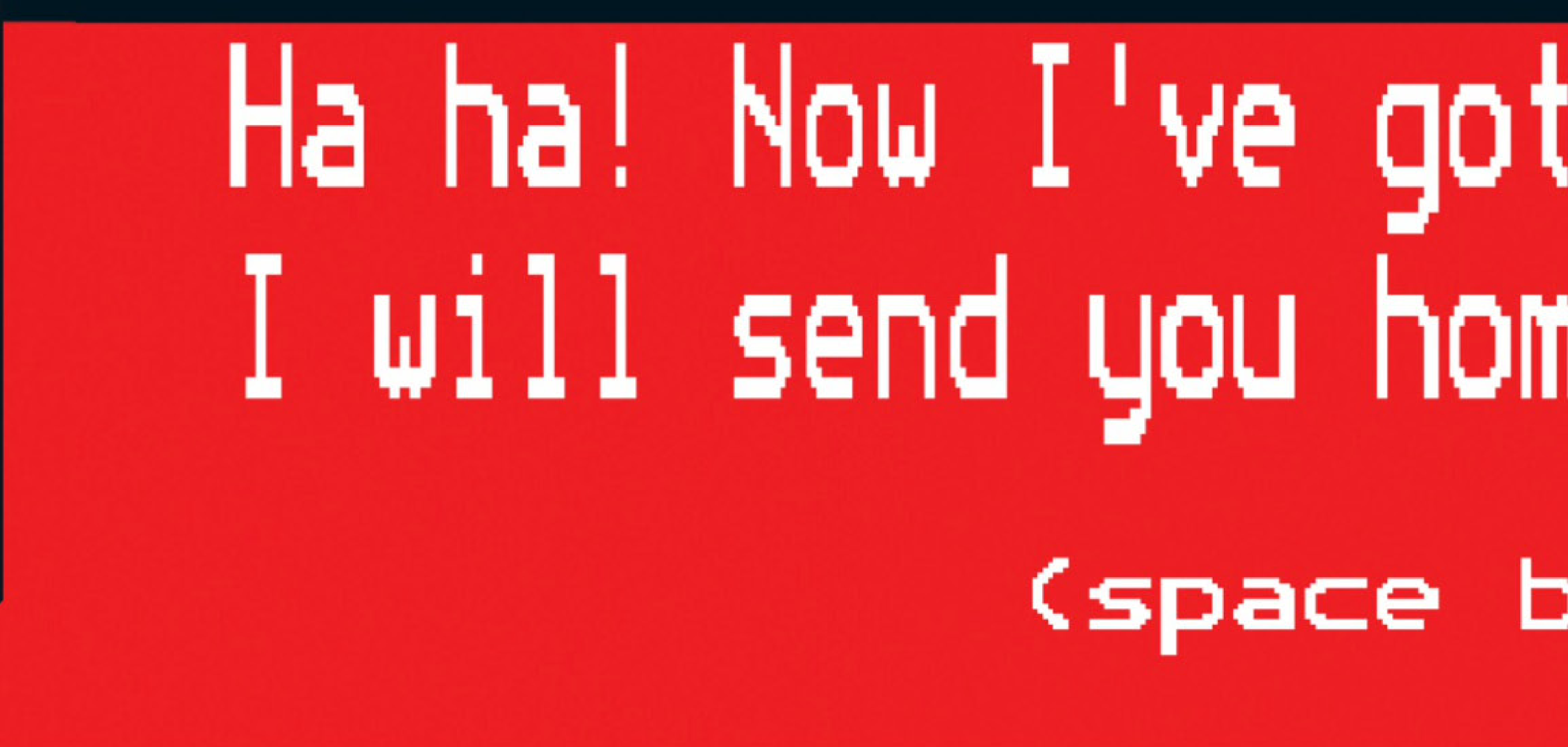
Granny's Garden

» **PLATFORM:** BBC Micro » **DEVELOPER:** Mike Matson » **RELEASED:** 1983

Oh no. *Oh no.* Something has gone terribly wrong. Perhaps it was because you were careless, or maybe you just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. It doesn't matter though, the outcome is inevitable – *she* has arrived, and now you've got to pay the price. The witch appears on screen, giving what appears to be some kind of whistle while making uncomfortable, unearthly noises. The ordeal only lasts for 15 seconds in real time, but it feels like hours in your mind, maybe weeks, years even.

Of course, the repercussions aren't quite as severe as might be expected – you're merely sent home, rather than eaten or transformed into a frog. But you know, just as every kid does, that's not how witches work. Frightful thoughts immediately begin running through your mind as you leave the job of taming the infernal, terrifying computer to your classmate. Few games possess such perfectly executed little slices of terror – and few make it so easy to experience them. *





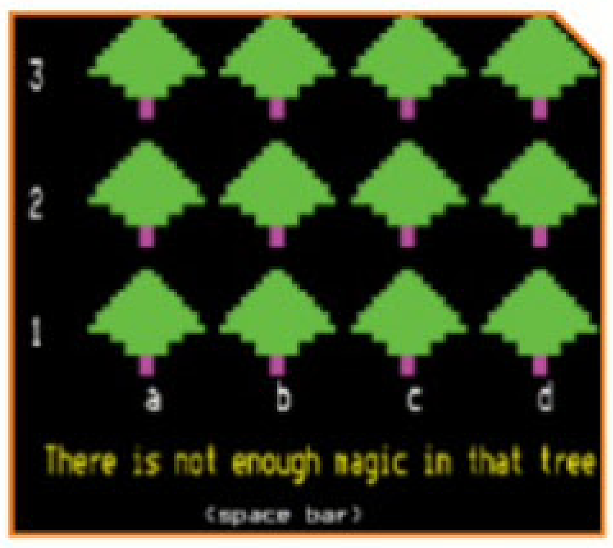
BIO

The BBC Micro was the ubiquitous school computer of the Eighties and even the Nineties – and Granny's Garden was its ever-present accompaniment. The game required you to rescue six kids by solving a variety of puzzles, based on literacy, logic, observation and sometimes just blind luck. The game was widely distributed in the UK, Australia and New Zealand and was a key piece of software that helped to establish computers in schools, at a time when computer literacy was uncommon. It also spawned the educational software company 4Mation, which is still active and continues to offer updated versions of *Granny's Garden*.



MORE CLASSIC GRANNY'S GARDEN MOMENTS

Awesome Trees



You have a grid of 12 magic trees before you, but 11, bizzarely, don't have enough magic inside them. Your job is to find the one that does. The only problem with that task is that you don't have any clues or hints to go on, so you will have to find it the old fashioned way – that's right, it's time for some trial and error! Well, this game is off to a rather brilliant start.

Down The Garden Path



If you're going to go on a strange journey, you may as well start it by having your very own assistant – a rather assertive talking raven, in this case – introduce you to a talking toadstool. And hey, why not get a friendly bee to sting a vicious dog on the bum while you are at it? Yup, the second act of *Granny's Garden* is quite bizarre indeed.

Catching The Dragons



Perhaps the most infamous of the game's puzzles, this logic problem is a bit of a stumper for primary school children. The trick is that each food will bring out one dragon, send back another, and leave the remaining two unchanged. Since the game tells you the effect each food has on each dragon once used, it's one of the better-designed segments of the game.

Psychedelic Syndrome



It's not easy to get into the Castle Of Dreams in the game's final quest. You'll have to take a very specific route and brave the cottage twice, and once you do actually get there, things get *weird* as the screen quickly fills with a bizarre display of graphical effects. But just when you think that you have crashed the computer, the rescued kid appears. Hooray!

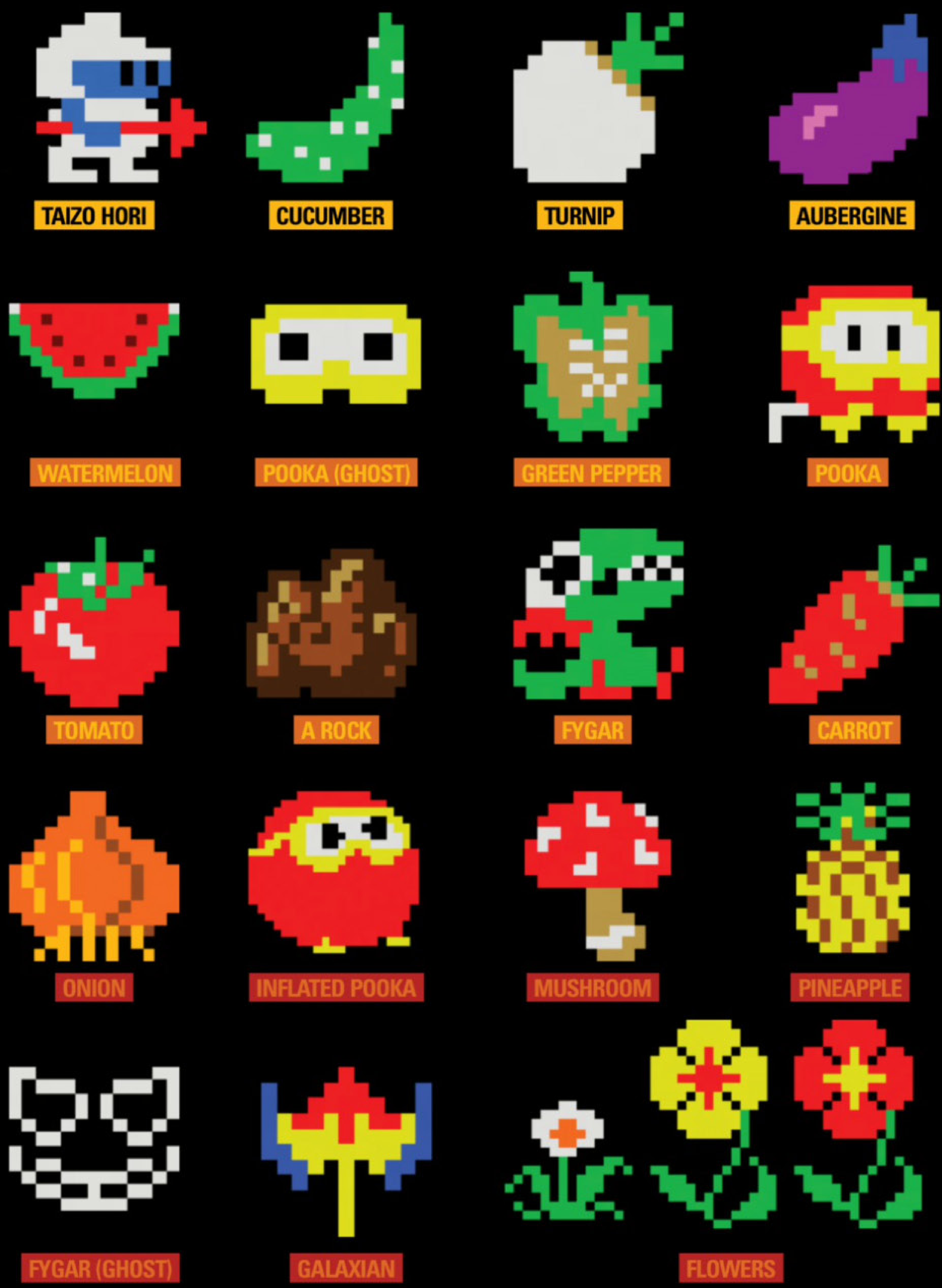


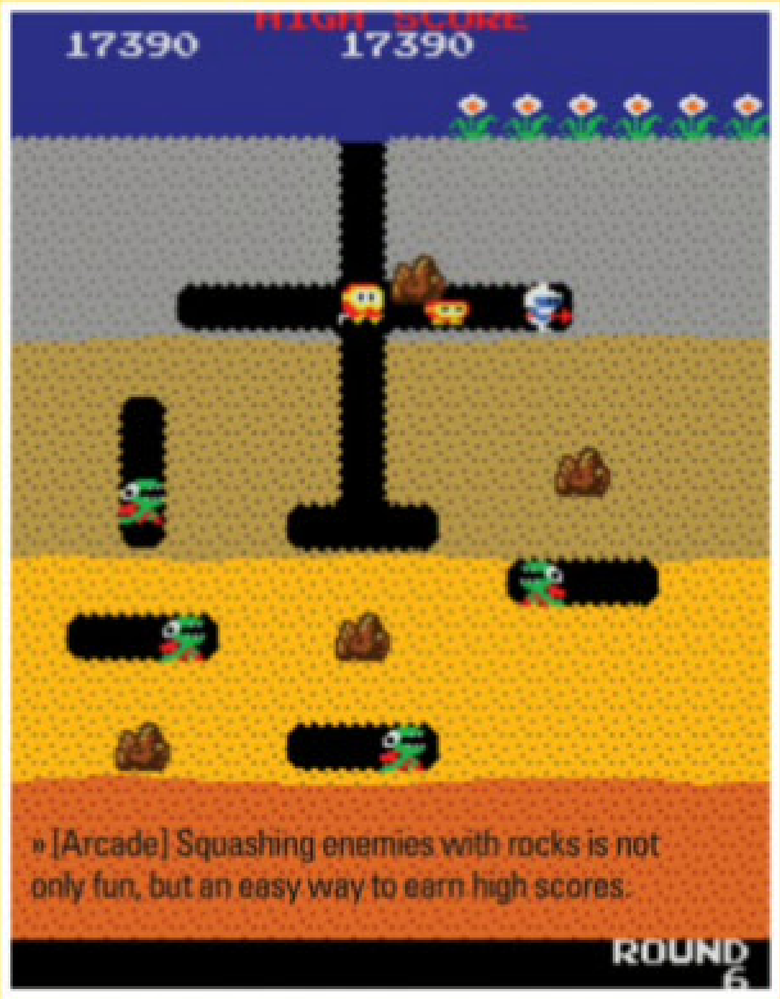
KIDS DON'T TYPICALLY LIKE VEGETABLES – BUT DIG DUG PROVES THEY GET FAR MORE PUMPED UP ABOUT THEM WHEN THEY HAVE TO BEAT MONSTERS TO GET THEM. NICK THORPE LOOKS AT WHY WE STILL DIG THIS ARCADE CLASSIC…

Mining isn't an easy job. Even if you're okay with the claustrophobic tunnels and long-term health issues, there are the dangers of explosions and cave-ins. But however bad it is in the real world, it's slightly worse for our hero in *Dig Dug* – sure, he might get squashed by falling rocks or die a horrible fiery death, but he's also got to deal with the monsters that are the reason he's down there in the first place. Luckily, he's able to fight with a unique piece of weaponry. By spearing his enemies and using his trusty pump, our protagonist can inflate the bad guys until they explode!

Prior to *Dig Dug*'s 1982 arrival, Namco had already experienced success with two popular maze games. *Pac-Man*'s success requires no recap, but *Rally-X* was also popular and became a part of the company's oft-revisited heritage. Both games followed a similar formula – the player was cast in the role of prey, forced to evade predatory enemies while collecting items in a maze. *Dig Dug* took this winning formula and inverted it – in this game, the player also takes the predatory role, as the elimination of all enemies is the only requirement to pass a stage. Of course, your enemies aren't defenceless. While the player is usually in a more favourable position ▶

PIXEL PERFECT





» [Arcade] Squashing enemies with rocks is not only fun, but an easy way to earn high scores.

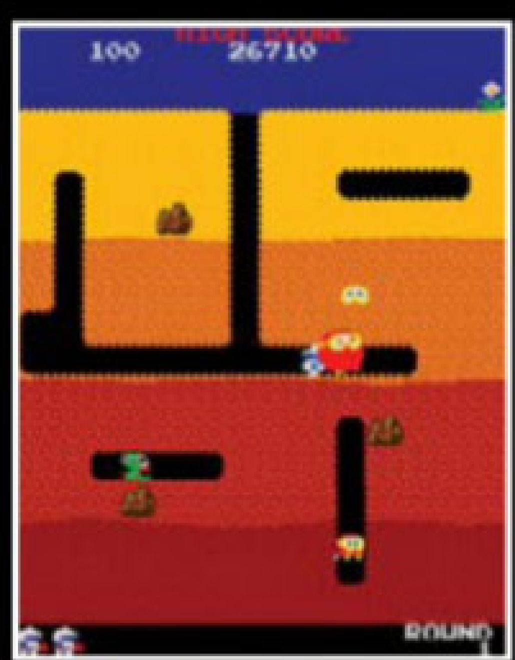
in any one-on-one confrontation, the enemies are aggressive and can take advantage of their greater number.

What's more, beyond a few pre-placed caves, the player creates the mazes by digging. Because the ability to dig allows you to go anywhere, the classic maze game trap of being caught between two enemies is no problem. But while you can go anywhere, so can enemies. They're mostly content to stick to the maze, however they'll occasionally turn into ghostly forms and start travelling through the dirt, meaning that you're never truly safe from attack. Enemies travel slowly through the dirt, too, meaning that you have an incentive not to create too many tunnels.

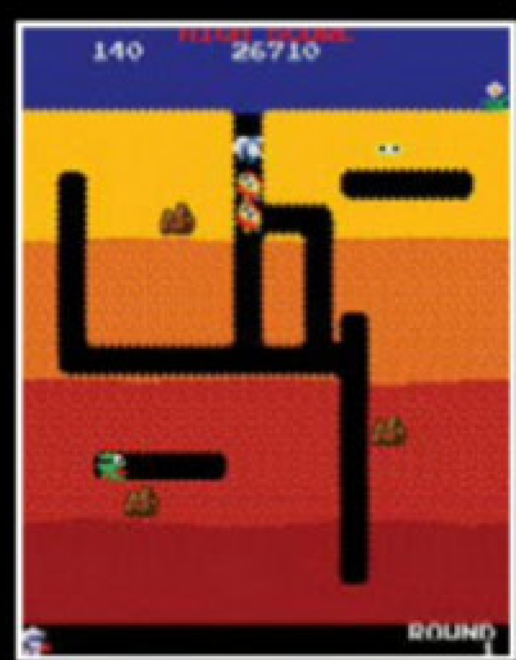
Of course, it'd be dull to create a game in which your only goal was to hunt and kill cannon fodder relentlessly, so some elements of risk and reward were added to *Dig Dug* to keep things interesting. For a start, while the Pooka enemies are fairly unthreatening, the Fygars can shoot flames horizontally – but you'll get double the points if you attack them from a horizontal position. Rocks are potentially risky, too. Each stage hosts a few rocks buried in the dirt, and you can dislodge them simply by tunnelling beneath them. A falling rock will kill anything it hits – Pookas, Fygars and even you. Why not simply avoid them, you wonder? Easy: a falling rock kill is worth considerably more

DIGGING DEEPER

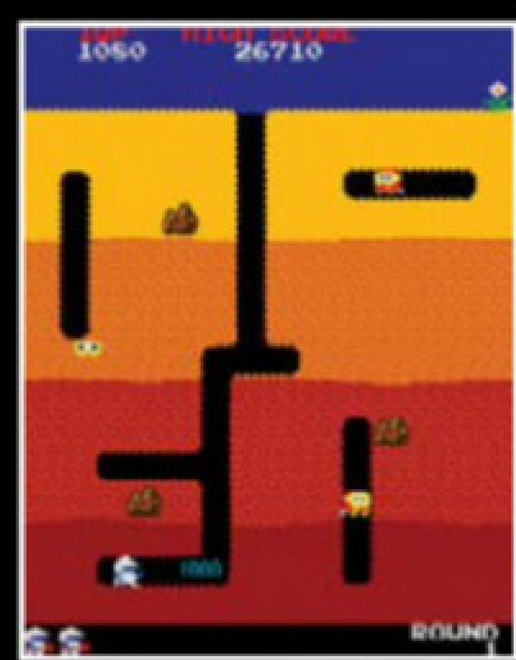
Tips for survival and high scores in the dark depths



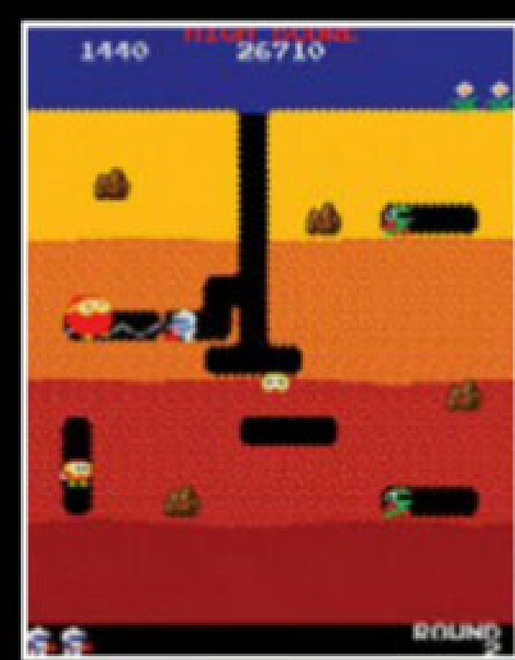
1 Enemies are faster than you, but you can run right through them if they're deflating, so get your pump ready to stun before you run.



2 If you're being pursued by two enemies, pump one. As the second passes it, disengage your pump by turning away to pop them both.



3 The deeper you dig, the more points enemies will be worth when popped. When you can, try to attack enemies in the bottom layer of soil.



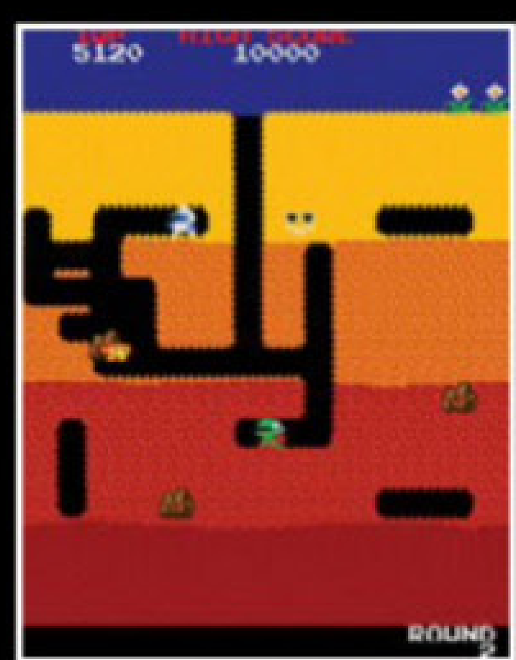
4 You can fire your pump through a thin layer of dirt, creating a shield. A Fygar can just breathe fire through it, though, so be careful.



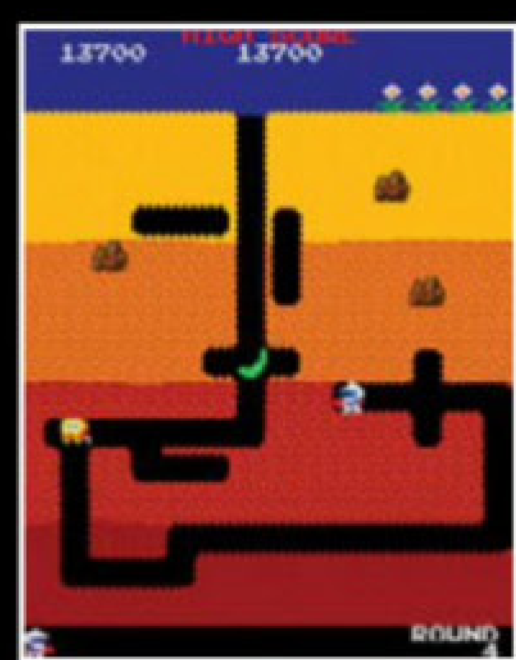
5 The best way to attack a Fygar horizontally is to stun it verticaly, allowing you to safely move to the danger zone and get extra points.



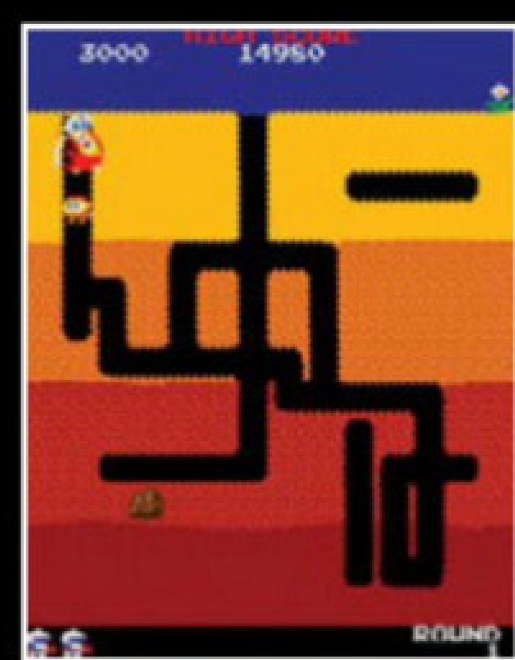
6 Always prioritise a Fygar over a Pooka when you need to destroy an enemy – a Fygar can toast you from afar while you're inflating a Pooka.



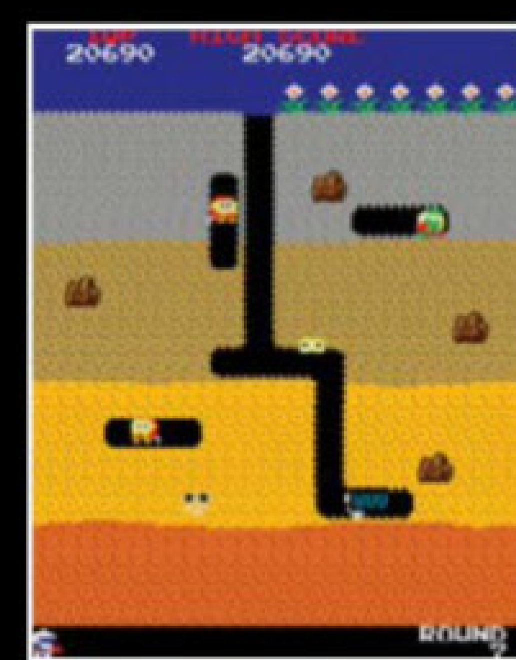
7 Flattening enemies by dropping rocks on them will earn you more points than popping them, so be sure to do this if you're after high scores.



8 Bonus items will not appear until two rocks have been dropped, so it's worth dropping them regardless of what's underneath.



9 The last enemy will flee to the top-left corner – only kill the penultimate enemy if you're able to catch the last, so you don't miss out on points.



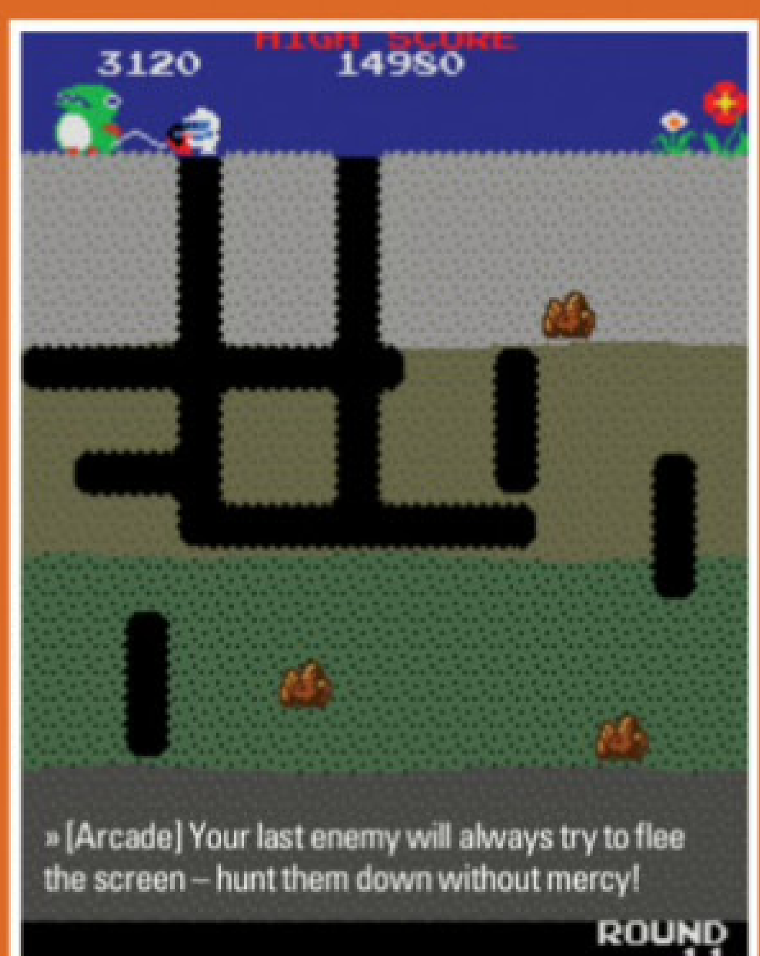
10 Score high to keep playing! Under most settings, you'll earn an life at 10,000 or 20,000 points, and at various scores thereafter.

points than a standard one, especially in the upper layers, and hitting multiple enemies will award major points. Better yet, dislodging rocks is the only way to trigger the bonus items, which are a variety of foods grown in the ground.

Despite the subterranean theme of the game, *Dig Dug* was far from being an underground hit. The cabinet had appealing artwork, the banjo-style ditty that plays throughout the game sticks in your head easily, and although there were mechanical innovations over Namco's previous maze games *Dig Dug* is, ultimately, a pretty simple game. Namco's testing found that not only was the game accessible, but it appealed to different players in different ways, with some enjoying rock-dropping and others preferring to frantically pump enemies. Not only was the game successful in its native Japan, but also in export markets where Atari sold thousands of cabinets. The game soon found its way to any machine that could run a game.

Later in 1982, Universal's *Mr Do!* would arrive in arcades. Though not officially related to *Dig Dug* in any way, the game greatly expanded on the digging-based gameplay of *Dig Dug* and for many, the two games are closely linked. For fans of *Dig Dug*, its arrival was a blessing – Namco took a long time to capitalise on the success of *Dig Dug* with a follow-up, as the official sequel, *Dig Dug II*, wasn't released until 1985. What's more, the sequel wasn't actually as similar to the original as you might imagine. The game switched to an overhead perspective and allowed the protagonist to defeat enemies (Pookas and Fygars, once more) either by inflating them or sinking the ground they stood on. Unfortunately, it wasn't nearly as popular as the original. As a result, the only contemporary home conversion for *Dig Dug II* was for the NES and it appears on far fewer compilations.

The *Dig Dug* series was trapped below ground until 2001, when Infogrames licensed the game for a low-budget PC revival called *Dig Dug Deeper*. The new game combined aspects of the first two games and received a relatively unenthusiastic response all round. Convinced that there was a good idea buried in that game, Namco once again chose to combine *Dig Dug* and *Dig Dug II* in 2005's *Dig Dug: Digging Strike* for the Nintendo DS. This game focused on boss fights and received a fairly average reception. Namco has also twice remade *Dig Dug* under the title *Dig Dug Arrangement* – once for *Namco Classic Collection Vol. 2* in 1996, and again for *Namco Museum Battle Collection* in 2005. These ▶



» [Arcade] Your last enemy will always try to flee the screen – hunt them down without mercy!

Q&A: DOUG MACRAE



The General Computer Corporation founder shares his memories of converting Dig Dug to the Atari 2600



Had you played *Dig Dug* before you got the job of working on the Atari 2600 version? If so, what did you think of it?
Yes, I had travelled to Japan to see the game so that I could help advise Atari's licensing group. Once Atari had obtained the licence, we received a coin-op version so that we could closely examine the game.

Who was on the team for the Atari 2600 version?
Ava-Robin Cohen did most of the game programming and I did the display kernel. Patty Goodson did the sounds and music. Randall McLamb did the graphics.

What access to the original *Dig Dug* arcade cabinet did you have while working on the conversion?
We had a coin-op cabinet in our lab.

What were the challenges of getting the game on the 2600?
Dig Dug could have many characters on the same horizontal line. The Atari 2600 supported two characters (sprites) on the screen but these could be reset on a scan line basis. We had set up the screen such that we would be resetting the characters, but that we would be multiplexing (flickering) the characters if we had more than two in a horizontal zone. Since the Dig Dug character was the most important, he was allocated more time during multiplexing than the other characters. In the end, the display worked quite well with very little flicker.



How long did you have to work on the game?
We were given four months.

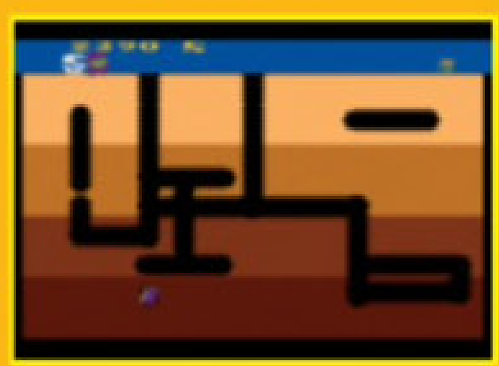
What aspects of the Atari 2600 version of *Dig Dug* were you most pleased with?
The display. We had reduced the flicker such that its impact was pretty minimal.

CONVERSION CAPERS

1982 1983 1984 1985 1986 1987 1988 1989

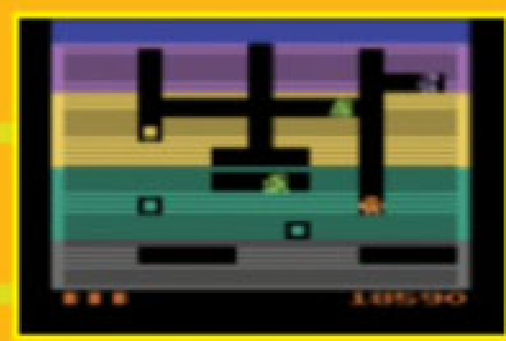
ATARI 8-BIT 1982

■ While most Atari versions of *Dig Dug* are good, this first effort is a stinker. It's visually subpar, with wrong-coloured enemies and featureless dirt, and the collision detection is awful. The music's good, though. Atari recognised the poor quality, and converted the Atari 5200 version to replace it in 1983.



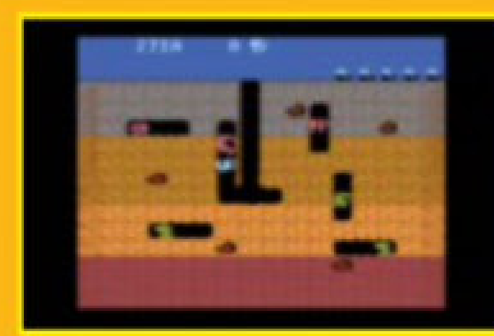
ATARI 2600 1983

■ Considering the limitations of the 2600, this is excellent. The graphics are simplified and there's some sprite flicker, but the gameplay is authentic to the arcade version. There's also a new walking tune, too.



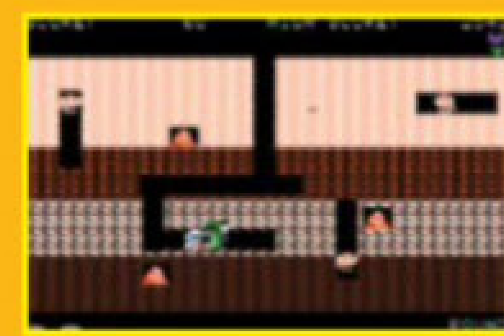
ATARI 5200 1983

■ Like most of the Atari versions, *Dig Dug* holds up well on the 5200. It looks closer to the arcade game than many of the early conversions, thanks to good dirt colours and some rather nice detail work.



APPLE II 1983

■ The Apple II version was panned at the time, and we can see why. This conversion is not only ugly, but slow and unresponsive. Everything is in, from the music to the flowers, but it's all quite sub-par.



FAMICOM 1985

■ Being more powerful than most machines on this page, it's no surprise that the Famicom presents one of the best versions of *Dig Dug*. Neither the graphics nor sounds are arcade perfect, but they're about as close as you could expect.



SORD M5 1982

■ *Dig Dug* on the Sord M5 doesn't look very much like the arcade game, but those who seek it out will discover that it does play quite well. The most surprising aspect of the game is that the sound is very good – some of the best amongst the early conversions.



MSX 1984

■ While you'll be dealing with single-coloured sprites all the way here, *Dig Dug* is quite good on the MSX. The game moves along at a nice rate and plays authentically and that tune sounds pretty good indeed. The playfield is even the correct, vertical shape!



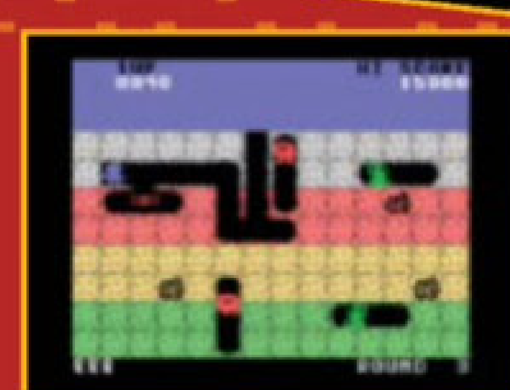
FM-7 1984

■ *Dig Dug's* conversion to Fujitsu's FM-7 was handled by Dempa, and looks very similar to the company's earlier PC-8801 version. The dirt looks nicer but the sprites come off a little worse. Of the two this is preferable for its excellent rendition of the music.



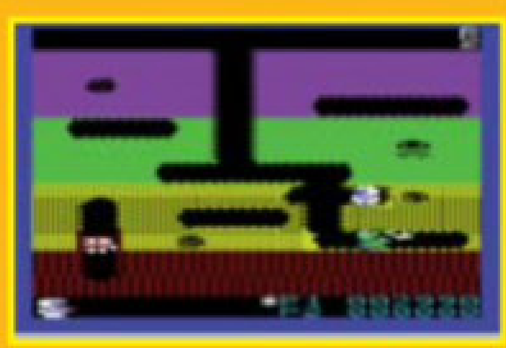
COLECOVISION 1984

■ This Atarisoft conversion of the game exists only as a prototype, as the release was scrapped during the US videogame crash. It plays smoothly, though there's no music at all and the use of flickering to simulate extra colours isn't brilliant.



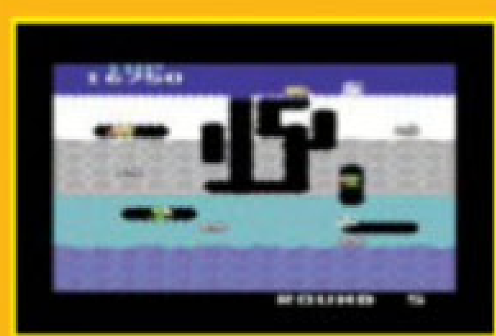
VIC-20 1983

■ Commodore's machine does a good job of replicating the arcade. It's not the prettiest version, but works well given its limitations. Unfortunately, the controls are less responsive than we'd hoped.



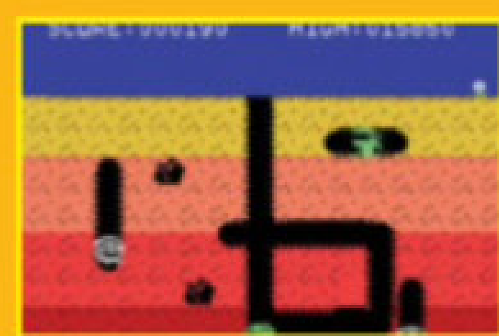
C64 1983

■ Atarisoft's *Dig Dug* is a great effort on the C64, which looks and sounds close to the arcade machine. The enemies are aggressive and you can't fire through thin walls, but this is otherwise a decent version.



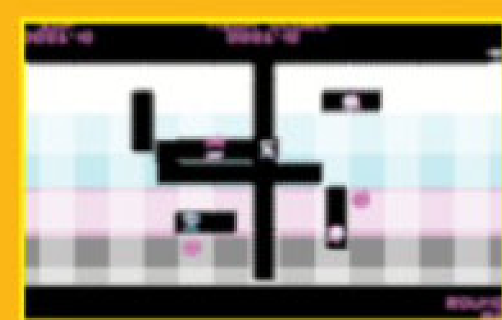
TI-99/4A 1983

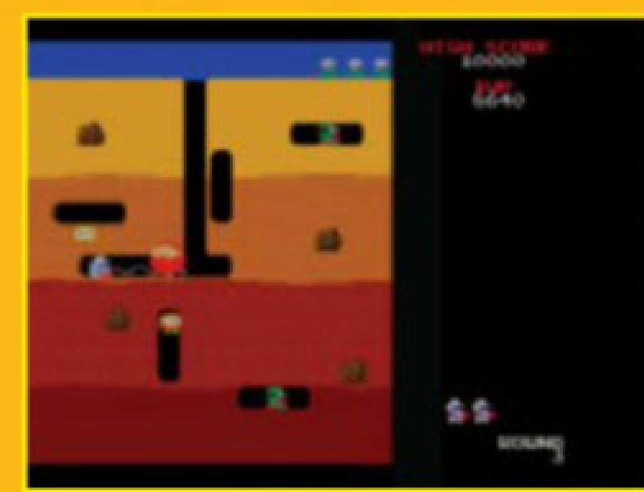
■ The TI machine gets a perfectly serviceable version of *Dig Dug*, featuring attractive visuals with a rather authentic look and some well-judged gameplay with slightly aggressive enemies.



PC 1983

■ This version is rather ugly, no matter which colour you use and the music consists of awful beeping. There's still a half-decent game of *Dig Dug* beneath all the presentational inadequacies, though.



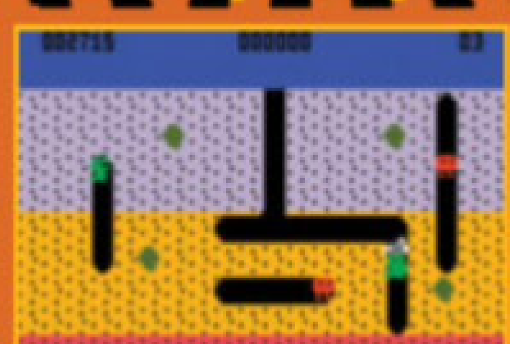


SHARP X68000 1995

■ Micomsoft's double pack of *Dig Dug* and *Dig Dug II* came very late in the day for the X68000. As you'd expect for such an advanced, powerful machine, this version is basically flawless and really represents the first time *Dig Dug* had received an arcade perfect conversion.

INTELLIVISION 1987

■ Originally developed by Atari in 1984, this version was a victim of the US videogame crash. Thankfully, INTV bought the rights a few years later and tidied it up for a final release.



ATARI 7800 1987

■ *Dig Dug* looks good here, with authentic visuals and gameplay that works as well as ever. Unfortunately, like so many games, the 7800's sound hardware lets it down.



1990 1991 1992 1993 1994 1995 AND MORE

AND THE REST…

■ As well as these stand-alone conversions, *Dig Dug* has appeared individually or on Namco Museum compilations for a variety of different formats, with most versions being arcade perfect or practically indistinguishable. Amongst the machines with such conversions are the PlayStation, N64, Dreamcast, PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, Game Boy Advance, PSP, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and Wii.

▶ versions have new elements such as simultaneous two-player digging, boss fights, power-ups and more.

As well as direct sequels, *Dig Dug* has a spin-off series. The 1999 action-puzzle game *Mr Driller* entered development as a third entry in the *Dig Dug* series, before changing focus and promoting the new star Susumu Hori. It was, however, the game that finally gave *Dig Dug*'s protagonist his name – Taizo Hori. In Japanese, the name has a double meaning – the surname comes first and forms a pun on the phrase, 'horitai zo', meaning, "I want to dig." Taizo even shows up in a few *Mr Driller* games himself, and Susumu joins Taizo in *Dig Dug: Digging Strike*. As is the case with many of Namco's early games, *Dig Dug* is also frequently referenced in other Namco games, including the likes of *Ridge Racer Type 4* and *Namco X Capcom*, and appears on a variety of Namco Museum compilations. In 2012, Namco's subsidiary ShiftyLook introduced a *Dig Dug* webcomic to celebrate the game's 30th anniversary (but unfortunately, the site is no longer available) and the characters even showed up for cameos in Disney's arcade-themed movie *Wreck-It Ralph*.

There's still a great deal of love for *Dig Dug* out there. Even though *Dig Dug* has fallen into inactivity once again, Namco's constant use of the game in cameos and compilation releases shows the respect that the company has for its heritage. What's more, the way Namco uses *Dig Dug* shows the reason why the game is still regarded fondly by so many players – in an era when games were just starting to harness the power of character design, *Dig Dug* married easily-understood mechanics with attractive visuals to create an appealing game. It wasn't the deepest or most challenging game, but Pookas looked cute enough to draw even non-gamers in and the gameplay was beginner-friendly enough to keep them interested. Over 30 years later, none of that appeal has diminished – and that's why *Dig Dug* is a classic. ★

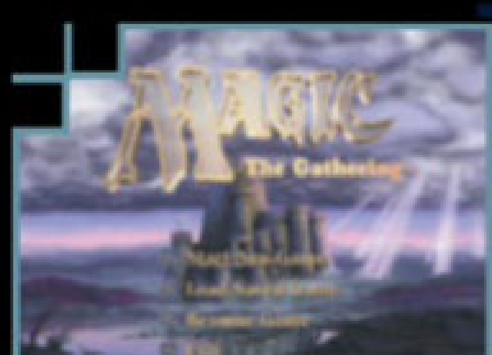
GAME BOY 1992

■ With no colour and a scrolling display, it might seem that the Game Boy version of *Dig Dug* is a little lacking. However, Nintendo's handheld offers an trump card in the form of *New Dig Dug*, an arranged version which radically changes the rules to provide a new experience.



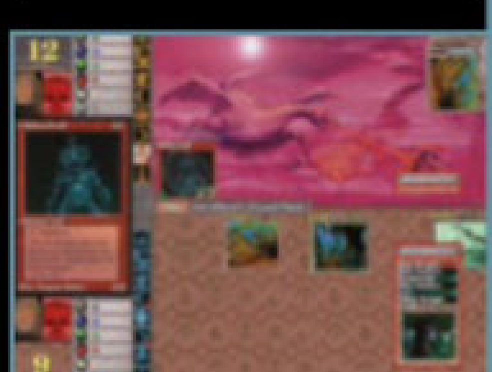
MAGIC The Gathering®

The collectible card game continues to expand, but making the first videogame based on it wasn't a smooth process. Adam Barnes discovers the challenges of MicroProse's Magic: The Gathering...



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** MicroProse
- » **DEVELOPER:** MicroProse
- » **RELEASED:** 1997
- » **PLATFORM:** Windows
- » **GENRE:** Strategy



MAGIC: THE GATHERING 101

■ The rules of the CCG were ported over well and while MicroProse couldn't account for every card, it was still a solid recreation. On top of that there was a campaign that has you navigating a world from an isometric viewpoint. Here you could visit locations to complete quests and duel other AI opponents on the map and collect new cards to build your own increasingly more powerful deck.

With something as pervasive as *Magic: The Gathering* it's hard to remember a time when it was an unknown entity. These days *MTG* is the single most popular collectible card game, beating back numerous contenders over the years and prevailing as the champion of strategic card games with an industry worth millions. In the early Nineties, however, its success was just beginning, and it wouldn't take any time at all before it would be brought over into the world of videogames. It was MicroProse that would eventually bring the physical realm of the Planeswalkers over into the digital scene, the perfect combination of a world-famous strategy developer to a burgeoning card game. At a time when many were still discovering *MTG* and many of its intricacies were being ironed out, the PC game would come to set the standard for so many similar games since, and even drive much of the physical game, too. But while it seems like an easy transition to make, the development of the first *Magic: The Gathering* game wasn't quite as simple as you might think.

David Etheredge was one of the designers that would come to work on the very first *Magic: The Gathering* game, and one of the inspired developers who insisted on making the game a reality. "My team was looking for a new project," says David of how the game came to be, "and we ran across *Magic* at our local comic store right after the Alpha set was released. We immediately knew *Magic* was going to be something special." This was in August 1993; *Magic: The Gathering*'s first run would go on to become incredibly popular and another limited edition run, now known as the Beta edition, would be printed, but already the spark of excitement was there with David and his team quickly setting about turning the card game concept into a videogame. "Our VP of R&D, Tony Parks, was a visionary and he let us go after the licence," adds David, "even though no one in management had ever heard of the game. I contacted Wizards Of The Coast about the rights and we had the licensing deal in place within a few months." With the deal in place the team's first job would be to port the mechanics over to an electronic system, but *MTG*'s turn-based systems were already set, so the core rules didn't need much in the way of design. Even so, the process wasn't a case of simply copying existing mechanics straight over, the card game was still young after all and there was much to learn.

"We started working on the game right after the Beta set was released," says David. "Back then, no one at Wizards Of The Coast had actually written definitive rules for how things like interrupts and instants (or as we called them, 'INTs') interacted with each other. In 'live' games, players sort of figured out how to handle the cards without needing detailed rules. But to code a game based on

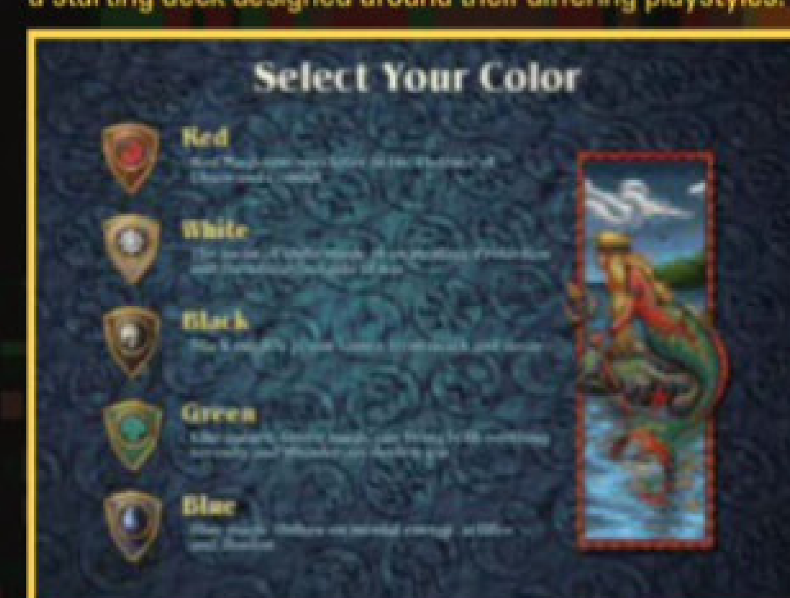
» [PC] The Overworld section of the game had enough random elements that each new game was subtly different, and therefore still entertaining to play through.



» [PC] Enemies had different strengths, with those closest to your spawn location having fewer hit points.



» [PC] You could pick one five colours to play as, giving you a starting deck designed around their differing playstyles.



> "We immediately knew that Magic was going to be something special"
> David Etheredge

an board or card game, you have to know exactly how the rules work and at that time the rules just weren't that specific. Stuff like what happened when each player wanted to play an instant at the same time. Or if a player could interrupt his own spells. Then there were cards that were like exceptions – it wasn't clear whether they behaved like INTs or something different. We had to figure out a way to let each player have the opportunity to play INTs without having a strict timing sequence that constantly reminded the players they had the opportunity to play a card."

The *Beta* run of the card game continued and expanded on the popularity of the original *Alpha* edition; the idea of this portable board game was becoming a phenomenal success – and David and the team had to make sure they could match that success. This led to delays for the videogame, not least because of the issues surrounding MicroProse at the time. "We started developing the game in DOS," says David of the game's first delay, "and then MicroProse shifted all game development to Windows and we restarted the project." David adds that the purchase of MicroProse by Spectrum Holobyte in December 1993 – not long after development had begun – also had an effect, with numerous reorganisations causing more delays. Then, with the popularity of *Magic* soaring and a tremendous deal of press for the latest fad, inevitably Sid Meier's own interest would be piqued and joined the project to see it become a title MicroProse could be proud of.



» [PC] It could be difficult early on to defeat some opponents since your deck just wasn't up to scratch.



MORE MAGIC

The videogames that followed...



MAGIC: THE GATHERING – BATTLEMAGE 1997

■ Rather than follow the example set before it on PC, Acclaim's PSone *Magic* game would turn it into something of an RTS with an incredibly unwieldy interface system. It was not well-received.



MAGIC: THE GATHERING – ARMAGEDDON 1997

■ An arcade version of a strategic card game is as bad an idea as it sounds. It, too, featured real-time combat that – while involving strategy – was much more focus on action than thought.



MAGIC: THE GATHERING 2001

■ Sega's version of *Magic* was a faithful recreation of the card game. It lacked the compelling campaign mode and was only released in Japan, but at least offered much of the game's strengths.



MAGIC: THE GATHERING ONLINE 2002

■ As the name might suggest, this game focused on recreating the card game in its most earnest as well as offering a way for fans of the game to play against one another. It is still running to this day.



MAGIC: THE GATHERING – BATTLEGROUNDS 2003

■ This PC and Xbox outing once again attempted to turn the combat into something more action-heavy. Players still utilised cards, but would need to move about the arena to avoid damage.



MAGIC: THE GATHERING – DUELS OF THE PLANESWALKERS 2009

■ The *Duels* series is an annual release for Wizards Of The Coast. It recreates the card game rules ably, but in a fashion that is easier for newcomers to learn.



MAGIC: THE GATHERING – TACTICS 2011

■ SOE's *MTG* reworked the ruleset into a combat system not dissimilar to *Heroes Of Might & Magic*. Like many games before it, this one relied as much on map positioning as smart card choices.

This was ultimately followed by a greater number of changes and additions to the game. Sid's arrival on the project would end up as something of a bittersweet revelation, however; this would be Sid Meier's final game at MicroProse before leaving to form Firaxis.

"Sid joining the team was a natural progression when we transitioned from the DOS version to Windows," claims David. "Sid had just released *Civilization* on Windows and he was interested in building out the solo part of the game, so the timing worked out." Sid's arrival on the team meant a number of design changes, but his biggest input would be in the single-player portion of the game. Despite the popularity that the card game was garnering, there were still expectations from videogames and Sid knew that the single-player component needed to be expanded upon if it was going to succeed. "We wanted the standalone game to mirror the experience of collecting your first set of cards," says David, "and building decks when you had a limited selection. RPG features fit in well with this concept – players 'leveled' by adding to the variety and power of the cards in their collection. By the end, you would have a pretty big collection and you would be able to build power decks." The RPG-style system was added to give players a sense of progression, enabling them to take on various difficult challenges, defeating AI opponents and earning new cards along the way. Rather than focus on stats and attributes, the game became about hunting for new cards in a fashion that mimicked the act of building an unstoppable *MTG* deck. It was an inventive system, one that both newcomers to the card game and existing fans could enjoy.



» [PC] Playing for ante meant that you could actually lose some of your own hard-earned cards.


» [PC] The map wasn't huge, but as Planeswalkers grew in strength they would need to walk from point-to-point.

But as important as the single-player portion was to the success of *Magic: The Gathering* as a videogame, it was especially imperative to capitalise on the strengths of the card game itself too. Primary among those was *MTG*'s multiplayer aspect; as entertaining as it was to earn a deck and learn the core mechanics of the game, MicroProse knew it needed more traditional battles. First there was a 'Duel' mode, an option that forewent the existing progression-based single-player for something more typical of the card game, allowing you to build a deck of your own and take on computer-controlled opponents. With the release of *Manalink* – an add-on for the game that enabled player-versus-player multiplayer – it was the duel mode that fully realised the whole experience. MicroProse ensured that fans of the card game would feel as comfortable as possible, an attitude that carried over to all aspects of the game's design. "*Magic* has always had great artwork," says David, highlighting the necessity for the team to replicate the great art that players would have seen on the cards. "We knew to make the fans happy, the game had to be graphically rich and the art quality had to be consistent with the physical cards. We had a great art team on the project led by Todd Bilger and I think the PC game ended up having really nice graphics for the time it was released."

Wizards Of The Coast naturally kept a close eye on the progress of the game, but to help drive existing card players to pick up the PC game it set MicroProse the task of designing 12 cards that would become unique to the digital experience only. This Astral set would give players a new set of tools to play with that they could only experience in the computer game, though David tells us that there was talk of including these cards as collectibles inside the game's packaging. "Wizards rejected the

Power Plays

Ten best cards from the game

CHANNEL + FIREBALL

■ Here's a classic combo, one that – if you already have a health advantage over your opponent – can allow you to combine the self-harming nature of Channel with the manually charged damage of Fireball for unstoppable damage.

FIREBREATHING

■ While this is largely reliant on a red deck, if you find yourself favouring this colour then this card is essential. It's especially useful later on in a game, as well as if you combine it with Dwarven Warriors' ability for easy damage.

BLACK VISE

■ Since Black Vise only requires one generic mana point to call into action it can be a great option should it be in your hand at the start of a game, offering up free damage with minimal effort. Its binary opposite – The Rack – is also a rather great option.

COLOSSUS OF SARDIA

■ As one of the costly cards in *MTG* it might seem like the Colossus should be rarely-used card, but the combine this with Instill Energy and you have a hard-hitting 9/9 Trampler.

GIANT STRENGTH

■ There are many cards that alter a Creature's damage and blocking capabilities, in the case of red decks you'll want to pick Giant's Strength. Regardless of the colour deck you choose, though, make sure you have a card that offers similar benefits.





> **“We knew to make the fans happy, the game had to be graphically rich”**
> David Etheredge

initial designs,” adds David, “and asked us to modify them so that each card had a random component that would make them impossible to use outside of the computer game. We ended up including oversized versions of the Astral cards in the box. I think players were disappointed because they had hoped the Astral set would eventually end up being ‘real’ cards they could collect.” These Astral cards all featured random elements, such as activating a effect, creatures that would swap their colour at the start of each round and even cards that would randomly destroy a creature on the board. Though their fallibility meant they would never have found much play in tournaments, their randomised effects meant they would have been impossible to utilise in a physical game of *MTG* anyway. It gave players a new aspect to try out, and though many lamented the exclusion of physical cards it offered something new all the same.

Despite the speed of development, the financial problems of MicroProse would delay the game until a release on PC in 1997. The deck amount was limited, however, what with the team working with the original Limited Edition Beta run from back in 1993. In that time the card game had ballooned in popularity, and Wizards Of The Coast had done everything in its power to capitalise on that. New editions and revisions were released, as well as new sets adding to the existing sets of cards. In the years of development, *MTG* had received ten new sets, bringing with them over 1,000 new cards to use in a deck.

“Our goal was to include every card that had ever been printed in the digital expansions, and for the expansions to follow the release of each new printed expansion,” David tells us. “There were some cards that were so broken in the early sets that Wizards Of The Coast didn’t want them included. There were others that were impossible to code without massive special cases.” Only two expansion packs were released for the digital game, bringing with them four of the card game’s expansions. As it happens, MicroProse would not work on any more *MTG* games after its second standalone expansion, *Duels Of The Planeswalkers*, and yet as fans who have kept up with *Magic* will know, this title remains a focus for the brand to this day. The legacy of MicroProse’s card game, it seems, is as important now as it ever was. ✱



» [PC] Visiting the many towns and bazaars was important in the search for new cards to add to your deck, especially early on.



» [PC] Defeating an opponent and claiming some of their cards was such a satisfying feeling.



» [PC] MicroProse had done a fantastic job of ensuring that each card was represented.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SID MEIER’S CIVILIZATION (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: DOS
YEAR: 1991

RAILROAD TYCOON
SYSTEM: DOS
YEAR: 1990

SID MEIER’S PIRATES!
SYSTEM: Commodore 64
YEAR: 1987

PESTILENCE

■ This card has a use by itself, but in truth it only becomes really powerful when you combine it with Circle Of Protection: Black to negate the damage to yourself. It’s even better if you counteract its end of turn ability by using a regenerating Creature.

THICKET BASILISK

■ It takes skill to use the Thicket Basilisk since it’s not so powerful it can’t be disposed of. Attach a Lure card to it and you’ll clear away any non-Wall Creature, though.

TRANQUILITY

■ This is sort of an emergency card, a sort of reset button you may need when encountering troublesome enchantments. It’s not one you’ll always want to use, you’ll be glad you have it.

ELEMENTAL BLAST

■ Here’s a combo that turns two innocuous cards into a game-winning strategy. Combine either Red or Blue Elemental Blast with either Thoughtlace or Chaoslace to destroy any would-be threat easily and cheaply.

INSTILL ENERGY

■ You’ll have a number of options available, from initiating an instant attack or having one of your Creatures attack and block in the same turn.





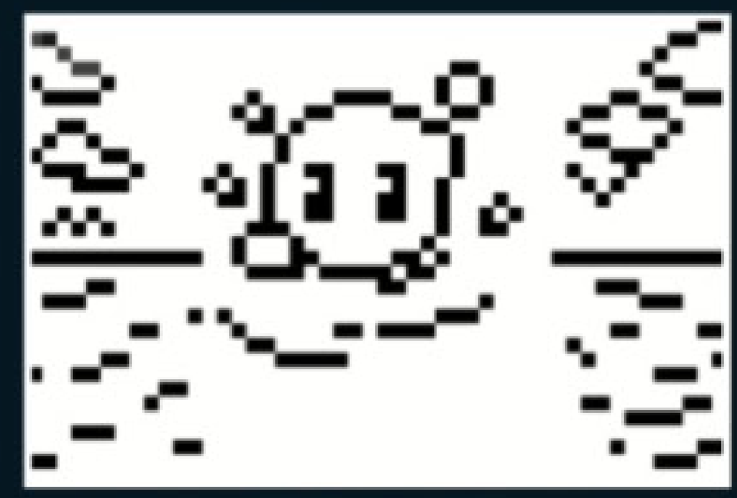
Visual Memory Unit

» PLATFORM: DREAMCAST » RELEASED: 1998 » COST: £10 (Boxed) - £4 (Unboxed)

It might seem odd that a company would release a memory card for its brand new console almost four months ahead of the console itself, but Sega did just that with the Visual Memory Unit (VMU). Pre-loaded with a *Godzilla* virtual pet game, the early release showcased the unit's most remarkable feature – the ability to play games independently of its host console. VMU games were typically downloaded from Dreamcast games and served to further the experience of the main game, but it was also possible to download games from the internet. Unfortunately, battery life in this mode was rather poor.

When plugged into a Dreamcast control pad, the VMU is employed as a second screen. It often provides additional information and can even be used to conceal information from opponents – handy when picking plays in *NFL 2K*, for example. As well as connecting to the Dreamcast, the VMU can connect to another VMU for multiplayer games and data transfer. It can even connect to certain arcade games, in order to save data and share it with home conversions. The versatile device was discontinued in 2001 when Sega withdrew from the hardware market, and late Dreamcast releases employed it for storage only. ★





ESSENTIAL GAME

Sonic Adventure 2

Sonic Adventure enabled you to raise the Chao creatures in special gardens, and the VMU let you take them out and train in virtual pet fashion with *Chao Adventure*. Both *Sonic Adventure 2* and *Chao Adventure 2* are improved, with more interactivity and optional extra fun. Your buddy will have random encounters, get sent on errands and develop their skills along the way. When they're done, they'll pop back into the game ready to outpace the competition in races and earn you emblems for the main game's final unlockables.

VMU Fact



■ Dozens of VMU designs were available during the Dreamcast's brief lifespan. Most of these appeared as Japanese promotional items, obtained in special hardware/software bundles or from Sega's online shops.

45g



TOP 25 XBOX GAMES

Microsoft's first console is currently on the cusp of its 15th anniversary. With that in mind, Darran Jones felt it was the perfect time to get readers to share their favourite games. We bet you can't guess what's number one…



Conker: Live & Reloaded

DEVELOPER: Rare Ltd

YEAR: 2005 **GENRE:** Adventure / Third-person shooter

25 *Conker* received unfair criticism on release because Rare had the apparent gall to re-release an old game rather than create a new one. *Live & Reloaded* is so much more than a rehash, though, having one of the most impressive graphical overhauls since *Resident Evil* on GameCube. While the single-player mode has been slightly refined, the actual 'Live' section of the game now disappoints due to the lack of online servers.

Otogi: Myth Of Demons

DEVELOPER: From Software

YEAR: 2002 **GENRE:** Third-person action

24 Both *Otogi* games were well regarded by readers, but it's the original that makes your shortlist. It remains one of the most delicious looking games on Microsoft's console with some glorious destructible environments and ridiculously designed bosses that still hold up today. The action, while not as comparable or as comprehensive as *Ninja Gaiden*'s remains sharply focused, while the 33 weapons all handle substantially differently to each other. It also has a neat combat mechanic where you must constantly kill enemies or grab power-ups to replenish your ever-depleting life bar.





Half-Life 2

DEVELOPER: Valve Software

YEAR: 2005 **GENRE:** First-person shooter

23 Although the frame-rate takes a staggering hit at times and there's no multiplayer, this remains an impressive conversion from Valve Software of its hit sequel. Superbly atmospheric and filled with amazing set pieces, it builds on the original game in exciting new ways and introduces gamers to the wonderful delights of the Gravity Gun. *Half-Life 2* set the gold standard for shooters at the time and its influence is still felt today.



Forza Motorsport

■ **DEVELOPER:** Turn 10 Studios ■ **YEAR:** 2005
■ **GENRE:** Racing

22 For all its success with *Project Gotham Racing* and *Rallisport Challenge*, Microsoft still needed a game to compete with PlayStation's *Gran Turismo*.

Forza proved to be a worthy alternative to Sony's car porn-laden game, and while it wasn't able to beat it in all areas — it has less cars and tracks for starters — it still did the job, going on to spawn many sequels.

As with the best *Gran Turismo* games, *Forza* excels with both its realism and content. The physics throughout are utterly convincing, ensuring the 231 available cars all handle differently to each other. The real-life tracks are full of detail, while gameplay modes like 'Arcade', 'Career' and 'Time Trial' ensures you'll be playing for an age. Most impressive, however, is the Drivatar function that lets an AI version of your car race if you can't be bothered to race. An excellent debut.

The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay

■ **DEVELOPER:** Starbreeze Studios, Tigon Studios
■ **YEAR:** 2004 ■ **GENRE:** First-person shooter

21 A joint union between Starbreeze Studios and Vin Diesel's recently formed Tigon Studio, *Butcher Bay* was a fresh take on the first-person shooter that spliced ballsy action with convincing stealth sections.

Many of *Butcher Bay*'s developers went on to create *Wolfenstein: The New Order*, and, as a result, both titles share plenty in common. They both feature stealth elements, have old-fashioned gameplay mechanics, a lack of multiplayer and weapons that are extremely satisfying to use.

While *Butcher Bay* occasionally moves into third-person it's ostensibly a traditional fps, containing all the tropes found therein. It's heavily story-based too, with Vin Diesel growling his lines with aplomb and delivering a digital representation of his character that's every bit as convincing as his performance in *Pitch Black*. The game received an updated version with multiplayer and an all-new extra campaign in the form of *Assault On Dark Athena in 2009*.



Project Gotham Racing

■ **DEVELOPER:** Bizarre Creations ■ **YEAR:** 2001 ■ **GENRE:** Arcade racer

20 The Xbox boasted an eclectic range of games for its launch, covering virtually every genre. As a result, *Project Gotham Racer* is the first of four launch games to make your final list.

Effectively a spiritual successor to Bizarre's popular Dreamcast game, *Metropolis Street Racer, Project Gotham Racing* takes many of the key strengths of the former game — real-life locations and the 'Kudos' system — and suitably overhauls them for Microsoft's beefy console. The 'Kudos' system in particular has been greatly refined, requiring you to fight for every single point you earn. The 200-odd courses offer plenty of opportunity for score chasing and are designed in such a way that seemingly impossible platinum badges can be eventually secured with practice.

Although the game is overtly dark (causing much annoying fiddling with your TV settings) the actual locations still look excellent, with recognisable landmarks and a smooth and stable frame-rate. The car handling is also solid, allowing you to get behind the wheels of a large number of vehicles that all feel suitably different to each other. It's not the most forgiven on racers thanks to some truly ferocious AI, but that makes your eventual wins all the sweeter.

The reason I bought my xbox
SILVERGUNNER



The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind

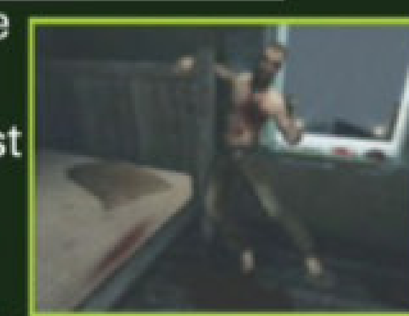
■ **DEVELOPER:** Bethesda Games Studios
■ **YEAR:** 2002 ■ **GENRE:** RPG



19 Ignore the drab colour palette and immerse yourself into one of the Xbox's most expansive game worlds. The combat may be clunky, but the deep skill system and entertaining story more than makes up for it. We recommend the more expansive Game Of The Year edition.

Call Of Cthulhu: Dark Corners Of The Earth

■ **DEVELOPER:** Headfirst Productions
■ **YEAR:** 2005 ■ **GENRE:** Survival horror



18 A truly stunning take on the first-person shooter and one of the most authentic *Cthulhu* games to date. It has lots of lovely gameplay mechanics, such as having to heal yourself in real time, as well as some oppressively creepy visuals. A real hidden gem.

Doom 3

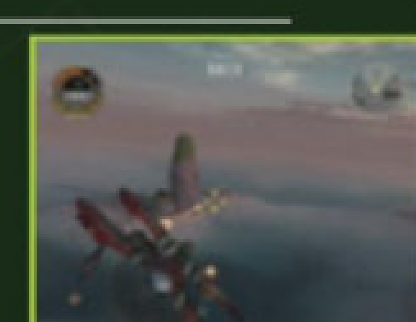
■ **DEVELOPER:** Vicarious Visions ■ **YEAR:** 2005
■ **GENRE:** First-person shooter



17 Yes, the loading times are ridiculous and it's incredibly basic, but that doesn't stop the third *Doom* game from being an immense amount of fun. A challenging atmospheric shooter that has some truly meaty weapons, just what you'd expect from id Software.

Crimson Skies: High Road To Revenge

■ **DEVELOPER:** FASA Studios ■ **YEAR:** 2003
■ **GENRE:** Arcade shooter



16 This is no stuffy flight sim. Instead FASA Studios created a ripping arcade-based shooter with a charming story and entertaining characters. There's great variety to the 20 available levels, while the local multiplayer is also resounding fun. It's a travesty we never received a sequel.

OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast

■ **DEVELOPER:** Sumo Digital ■ **YEAR:** 2006
■ **GENRE:** Arcade racer



15 Although it's essentially a fantastic port of both *OutRun 2* and *OutRun 2 SP* there's enough new content and additional love from Sumo to make it feel like its own game. A truly mesmerising racer that truly captures Sega's halcyon days.



Super-fast fighting, excellent graphics and a bit of harmless smuttiness was a winning combination and I've been keeping up with the series to this day as a result
MEGAMIXER

Dead Or Alive 3

■ **DEVELOPER:** Team Ninja ■ **YEAR:** 2001 ■ **GENRE:** Beat-'em-up

74 While we'd argue that *Dead Or Alive Ultimate* is the far better game, there's no denying the sheer brilliance of Team Ninja's first Xbox exclusive.

If you didn't know its heritage you'd think it was a Sega game at first glance thanks to its crisp locations and wonderfully rich blue skies. While the character models are evidence that the game has obviously aged, the locations themselves are still beautiful, taking swaying rope bridges, gorgeous beaches and snowy wastes and filling them with incidental detail. It's a remarkable-looking release and remains one of the system's best-looking fighters.

There's more to *Dead Or Alive 3* than just vibrant visuals, however, with the combat still holding up remarkably well. Newcomers Brad Wong, Christie, Hayate and Hitomi all play completely differently to each other and will take an age to master effectively. The 'Paper, Stone, Scissors' gameplay still has a lovely flow to it, while the move away from juggling and longer counter periods make it more suitable to newcomers of the genre. Even seasoned veterans will get their enjoyment from Team Ninja's game however, particularly if they go for the Japanese version, which features numerous changes to the characters' attacks.

While the included story mode is bobbins of the highest order, the actual content available in *Dead Or Alive 3* is far better. Time Attack and Survival modes offer plenty of scope to improve your play, while the tag team and co-op arenas allow you to show off what you've learned with a flourish. It's all impeccably packaged with high production values and great cutscenes. It's also currently available for pennies, meaning there's no excuse to not own it.

Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath

■ **DEVELOPER:** Oddworld Inhabitants
■ **YEAR:** 2005 ■ **GENRE:** First-person shooter

73 In many ways *Stranger's Wrath* reminds us of *Metroid Prime*. Like the earlier Retro Studios game it's effectively an adventure game that just happens to use the first-person viewpoint. It also places exploration above all-out shooting and has a surprisingly rich story. The weapon system of *Stranger's Wrath* remains a highlight of the game, thanks to the 'live' ammo that you can use to trap, stun and blow up enemies. It also boasts a surprisingly mature (and very dark) narrative that nicely mirrors earlier *Oddworld* games. Add in a well-structured bounty system (enemies are worth more money alive but are more dangerous to capture) and exotic looking environments and *Stranger's Wrath* becomes another Xbox essential.

Recently replayed most of this on Vita which showed that it still holds up today with its great mechanics
YOSHIMAX



Fable

■ **DEVELOPER:** Big Blue Box
■ **YEAR:** 2004 ■ **GENRE:** Adventure

72 With Peter Molyneux offering the Earth it was inevitable that *Fable* was never going to live up to all its hype. Play *Fable* away from all those broken promises, however, and it proves itself to be a charming, if rather standard, *Zelda* clone. While the story is utterly generic, there's plenty of solid voice acting and some dramatic plot turns. The leap from child to seasoned warrior feels a little rushed and many of its design aspects feel antiquated (further proof that the Xbox is a retro console) but the alignment mechanic still holds up today, with your character's deeds shaping his final appearance. If you've never played *Fable* before then we'd advise you to pick up *Fable: The Lost Chapters*, which expands on the original game by adding 16 additional quests, new areas to explore in addition to a wealth of other features.

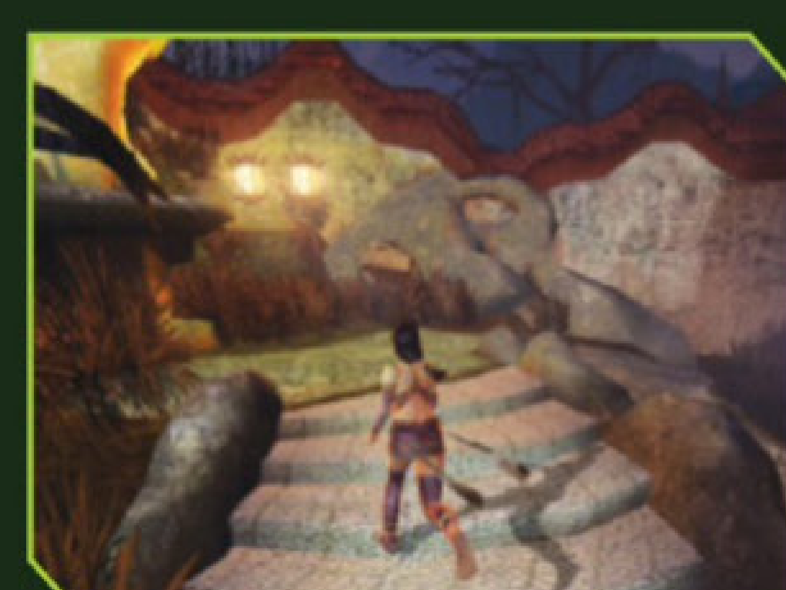




Jade Empire

■ **DEVELOPER:** BioWare ■ **YEAR:** 2005 ■ **GENRE:** RPG

71 No one seems to speak fondly about BioWare's eastern RPG, which means we're rather surprised to see it chart so high in your top 25. Like *Knights Of The Old Republic* before it, *Jade Empire* boasts an intricate and interesting game world that begs to be explored, as well as a solid nuanced combat system. It builds upon the path system that was featured in *Knights Of The Old Republic* and has a large roster of interesting player characters and NPCs to interact with. It also introduces the ability to form romantic relationships with other characters, a mechanic that BioWare has greatly evolved since its introduction. Its sales never matched its high critical claim, however, which probably explains why BioWare has never created a sequel.



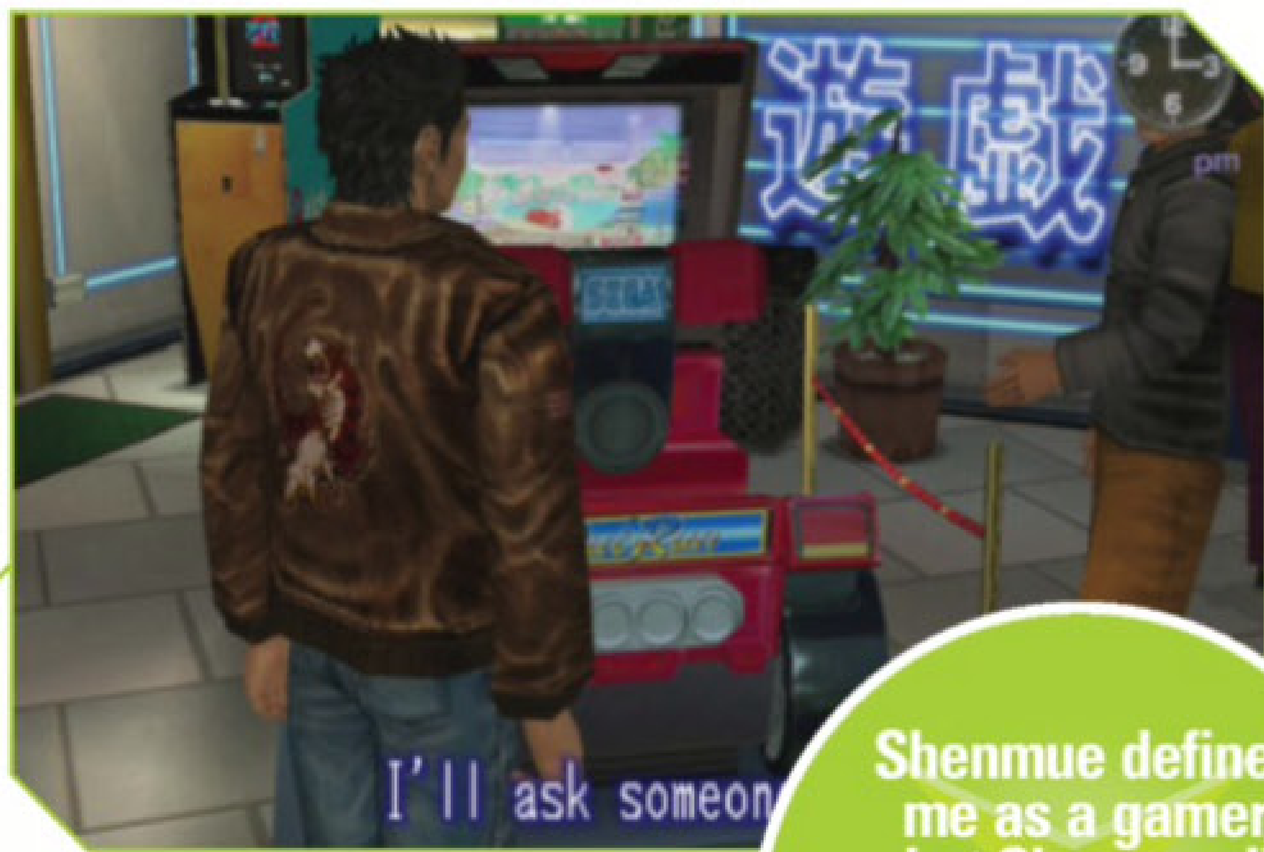
Ninja Gaiden/Ninja Gaiden Black

■ **DEVELOPER:** Team Ninja ■ **YEAR:** 2004 ■ **GENRE:** Third-person action

9 We included votes for both *Ninja Gaiden* and *Ninja Gaiden Black* for this entry, as they are essentially the same game. And what a game it is!

Even today, *Ninja Gaiden* is insanely good fun and miles better than both its HD sequels. Yes, the original suffers from the occasionally wonky camera views, and, yes, the story is just throwaway nonsense, but the action, my goodness the action! Few games on the Xbox let you feel as empowered as when you play as Ryu Hayabusa. The combat throughout is fluid and organic; every available weapon instantly and dramatically alters combat, while the boss fights are constantly challenging and never unfair or overtly punishing, providing you make good use of that block button. Platforming is also well handled in *Ninja Gaiden*, easily matching the excellent *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* (which didn't make the cut) and making good use of the gorgeous environments. A wonderfully frenetic action game and an essential purchase for any Xbox owner.







Shenmue defined me as a gamer, but Shenmue II delivered on the expectation that sequels should always be better
SAMHAIN87

Shenmue II

■ **DEVELOPER:** Rutubo Games (Sega AM2, Dreamcast) ■ **YEAR:** 2002
■ **GENRE:** Adventure

10 As the internet melts down with the news of a Kickstarted *Shenmue III*, let's remind ourselves why it's causing so much rabid excitement.

Return to *Shenmue II* today and you realise that it's still an astonishingly detailed game thanks to Sega cramming Hong Kong and several other key locations into your humble Xbox. Some might be put off by the larger focus on QTEs and its seeming linearity, but it remains a massive game to get lost in, particularly once you find the arcades…

Add in some memorable characters, the ability to do part-time jobs, a robust fighting engine, enchanting characters and a truly phenomenal score and Sega's game remains one of the Xbox's most unique and rewarding experiences. Little wonder, then, that *Shenmue III* hit $2 million in crowdfunding in less than 10 hours.

Burnout 3: Takedown

■ **DEVELOPER:** Criterion Games ■ **YEAR:** 2004 ■ **GENRE:** Arcade racer

8 'Vicious' is perhaps the best way to describe Criterion's second *Burnout* sequel. Unlike the previous games you're actively encouraged to take down as many of your opponents as possible, with points being awarded for particularly inventive crashes. It not only works exceedingly well, elevating *Burnout 3* into more than just another arcade racer, but it also highlights Criterion's refined RenderWare engine. Even when you're eventually out of a race you can still have the last laugh thanks to the new 'Aftertouch Takedown' mechanic, which lets you steer your wreck into the path of your opponents. The addition of D.J. Stryker is the only real fly in Criterion's game, but thankfully you can switch him and his useless drivel off.





Is arguably still one of the most playable racing games on console. I prefer this to any of its sequels. Only the recent DriveClub has captured a simular feel/balance
F2097



Project Gotham Racing 2

■ **DEVELOPER:** Bizarre Creations
■ **YEAR:** 2003 ■ **GENRE:** Arcade racer

7 While we prefer the original game, there's no denying that Bizarre Creations created a worthy sequel in *Project Gotham Racing 2*, even if it does feature fewer vehicles to race. It introduces online racing and rankings, lets you race in various SUVs and also marked the debut of the brilliantly addictive mini-game *Geometry Wars*. The engine's been suitably improved and it boasted some generally decent DLC (which is sadly no longer available to download). Ultimately it's the competitive racing that makes *PGR 2* so fun to play and it's no surprise to see it chart so high in your list.

Jet Set Radio Future

■ **DEVELOPER:** Smilebit
■ **YEAR:** 2002 ■ **GENRE:** Platformer

6 As good as *Jet Set Radio* was, its sequel is so much better. You're still racing around a futuristic Tokyo as part of the GGs, but the structure of everything is far better. The time limits have been removed, levels are interconnected with multiple objectives, while locations are far larger and beg to be explored. Graffiti tagging is a little basic, and some won't like the platforming, but this remains a stunningly inventive game.









Panzer Dragoon Orta

■ **DEVELOPER:** Smilebit
■ **YEAR:** 2002 ■ **GENRE:** Rail shooter

4 It's wonderful to see this excellent shooter so high. As difficult as it is beautiful to look at, *Orta* didn't introduce a huge amount of new features to the series, but they were all good ones. The most pertinent are the dragon transformations that give *Orta* some much-needed strategy, but the glide gauge is equally useful, allowing you further control over your mighty mount. It's perhaps a little to difficult in places, with some annoying bottlenecks, but the stupendously good visuals and the insane over-the-top bosses will constantly drive you forward.

> **It throws tons of stuff at you all of the time and so you really have to train yourself to pick off targets and prioritise threats quickly**
> QRZIMOD



Halo 2

■ **DEVELOPER:** Bungie
■ **YEAR:** 2004 ■ **GENRE:** First-person shooter

5 While we feel that *Halo 2*'s story is far weaker than the original, it's multiplayer was phenomenal. Even playing it today, the breadth of content for *Halo 2*'s multiplayer is staggering. The game modes are excellent, while the maps are exceptionally well-designed. Yes, that damned Energy Sword is a pain in the ass to fight against, but you feel like an unstoppable juggernaut when using it. The other weapons feel far better balanced, while the experience online helped cement Xbox Live as the definitive venue for online console gaming.







OutRun 2

■ **DEVELOPER:** Sumo Digital ■ **YEAR:** 2004 ■ **GENRE:** Arcade racer

3 Sumo's port of Sega's arcade game is quite simply magnificent. It's not only exceedingly accurate, but also includes a wealth of content in the form of exciting new missions that heavily riff on *OutRun 2*'s Hearts Mode. It continues to heap on the content too, adding the original arcade game, remixed audio tracks, additional cars and tracks from *Scud Race* and *Daytona USA 2*. Despite being an Xbox exclusive, it wasn't a huge seller for Sega, which makes it rather gratifying to see it place so high here on your list.

Knights Of The Old Republic

■ **DEVELOPER:** Bioware
■ **YEAR:** 2003 ■ **GENRE:** RPG

2 This epic RPG remains one of Bioware's finest moments. While it's set in the *Star Wars* universe, Bioware's decision to set story events roughly 4,000 years before the rise of the Galactic Empire gave it plenty of scope and creative freedom. While familiar worlds are revisited, much of *KOTOR* feels fresh and exciting, helped in no small part by an excellent script and great characters. As with many Bioware games, every single character and NPC is fully fleshed out, creating a gigantic and vibrant world that just begs to be explored. Filled with dramatic story twists and an excellent combat system (fuelled by the same D20 system used in the third edition of *Dungeons & Dragons*) *KOTOR* is arguably the best RPG on Microsoft's console. Oh, and if you're wondering where it's equably enjoyable sequel ended up on your list, it made position 26.





Playing this on legendary with my brother really forced us to communicate; such a stiff challenge (the game, and talking to my brother). Weapons with character, plus clever AI, and fun vehicles, the game that sold the machine
BROKEN THUMBS

retro GAMER READERS' CHOICE







Rekindled my love for gaming after the demise of the Dreamcast. At the time I had completely lost interest in the hobby until I was gifted a Xbox+Halo in the summer of 2002. I had no idea what I was getting into
ROGUE SOUL



Halo: Combat Evolved

DEVELOPR: Bungie **YEAR:** 2001 **GENRE:** First-person shooter

1 It's easy to be dismissive about *Halo*, but it's equally easy to forget what an important impact Bungie's game actually made on the console market upon its release in 2001. Even when you revisit it today, it holds up incredibly well, going to places that many current first-person shooters are still wary to tread.

A recent playthrough highlighted the sheer scope of Bungie's game to us. The environments of *Halo* are not only huge, they're interesting, making you want to head off the beaten path just so you can look behind the next rock or marvel at the texture of that distant tree. You'll rarely find anything hidden there (*Halo*'s not really that sort of game) but it doesn't stop you looking. Like *Shenmue II*, *Halo* makes you feel like you're part of a living, breathing world. Unlike *Shenmue II*, it also makes you feel like you're taking part in a movie. James Cameron has joked in the past that without *Aliens* there wouldn't be *Halo*, but you can see where he's coming from. There's a tangible feeling of being part of something so much bigger when you play through *Halo*'s levels, and while its cinematics have obviously dated, the constant narration from Cortana strengthens *Halo*'s filmic nature.

In addition to creating an exciting world for us to explore, *Halo* also ushered in a new weapon system, which also helped ground players in Bungie's game. Even today the tactical decisions that come from only being able to use two weapons at a time impresses. You have to really think when you engage in a firefight, hoping you've made the right decision with your current setup. It becomes even more crucial when you play *Halo* on its higher difficultly levels and realise just how fiendish and advanced Bungie's AI is. Every foot of ground covered in *Halo* on Legendary difficulty feels like an achievement and it's a testament to Bungie's skill that it still holds up today. Add in the innovative shield system that first-person shooters continue to rip-off some 14 years later and a plethora of cool vehicles that you can commandeer and *Halo*'s impact on the genre becomes even easier to see.

Equally impactful was Halo's multiplayer. While it didn't support online play, networked games with 16 players were a revelation.

20 years ago the thought of Microsoft being in the console race was laughable, now it seems ridiculous to think it was never in it. *Halo* was a game-changer and a huge part of the console's early success. It's not surprising to see that so many of you agree with us.

Five Reasons Why It's Great

1. A rousing score and clever pacing help give Bungie's game a slick cinematic pacing
2. Excellent maps and beautifully balanced weapons lead to exciting multiplayer matches
3. The various vehicles control exceptionally well, adding to Halo's variety
4. The sheer sense of scale of levels like The Silent Cartographer still manage to wow
5. It has one of the most satisfying sniper rifles to be found in any first-person shooter

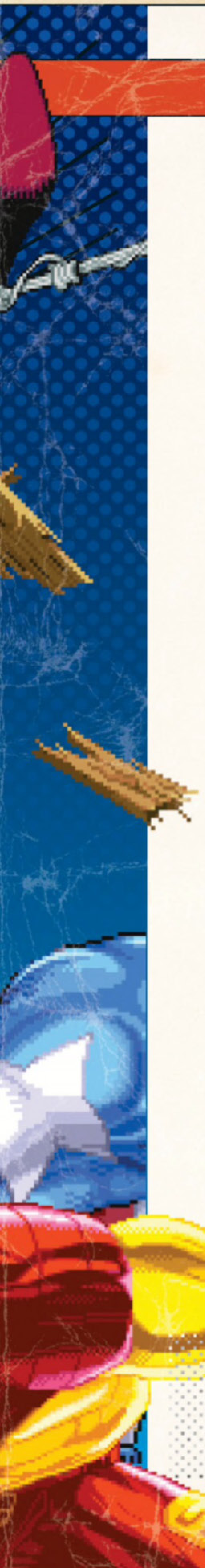


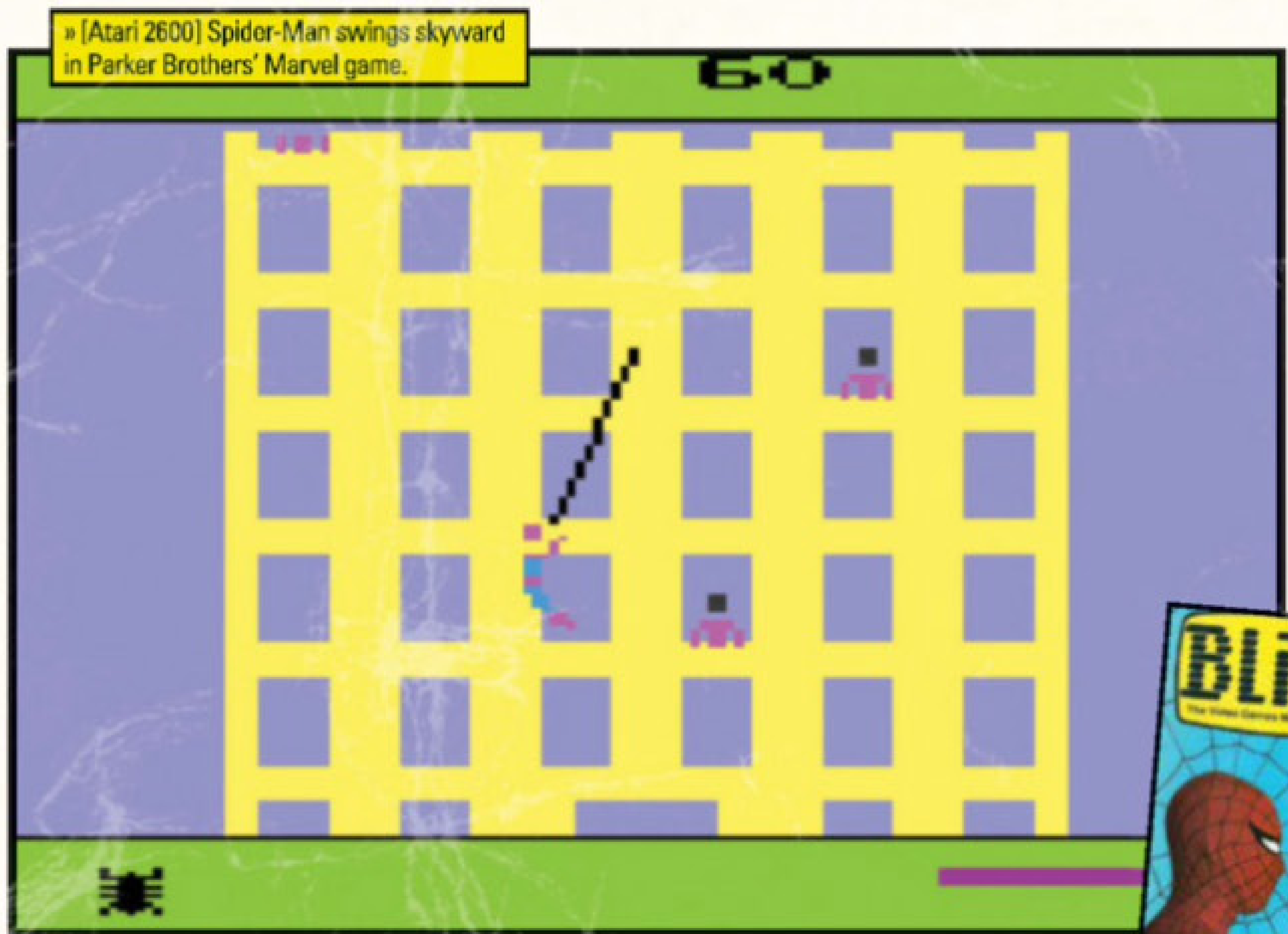
THE Bluffer's guide TO

ISSUE 144

MARVEL SUPERHERO GAMES

The legendary Marvel built an empire from comic books, movies and animated TV series, but what about videogames? Mike Bevan investigates the digital history of some of its most famous superpowered progeny





» [Atari 2600] Spider-Man swings skyward in Parker Brothers' Marvel game.



» Spider-Man plays his own videogame debut on the cover of Marvel's *Blip*.

Are superheroes taking over the world? On the strength of the recent movies based on heroes such as Iron Man, The Avengers, Captain America and the mighty Thor they're certainly taking over the cinema. But as a company that worked in print for most of its 75-year existence, Marvel has spent nearly half its life promoting its characters through videogames, and has been doing so for longer than it has been making films. Its most popular superhero, from a gaming perspective, is Spider-Man who has a staggering 57 associated titles. Mutant power comes in second with 38 game tie-ins for the X-Men. Other well-known Marvel characters have far less, with The Incredible Hulk and Iron Man weighing in at seven (starring games) each, and Captain America and The Fantastic Four bringing up the rear with six titles per franchise. But that's not including crossovers like *Marvel Vs. Capcom* and *Lego Marvel Super Heroes* or a whole clutch of characters like Thor, Blade, Silver Surfer and even Howard The Duck. In total there are over 150 interactive titles based on licences from Marvel. That's a lot of games.

The honour of producing the first commercial videogame based on a Marvel character belongs to the aptly-named board game manufacturer Parker Brothers. Better known as the creators of *Monopoly* and *Risk*, Parker ventured briefly into videogame publishing in the early Eighties, securing the rights to an Atari 2600 title based on *Spider-Man*. The resulting game was a simplistic affair resembling the arcade game *Crazy Climber*, where our hero scaled tower blocks taking out bandits and bombs planted by his arch-nemesis. "We decided on the Green Goblin since that was the main villain at the time, and also it was the easiest to do because he could fly," says programmer Laura Nikolich. "Marketing always wanted to scroll horizontally, instead of vertically, and that would have been hard to do. I designed the game more to reflect the limitations of the Atari 2600 which is why it is a vertically-scrolling game."

"SPIDER-MAN HAS A STAGGERING 57 ASSOCIATED TITLES"

Coinciding with the release, Marvel published a videogame magazine called *Blip*, the second issue of which featured Spider-Man playing his own game on the cover, along with images of creator Stan Lee and friends enjoying Parkers' product. *Blip*'s signature feature was the lovingly-illustrated videogame-themed comics running throughout its pages, but unfortunately the magazine only ran for seven issues. Parker Brothers advertised a second Marvel 2600 game based on *The Hulk*, but when the company pulled out of the videogame market it remained forever in limbo. However, the next proper licensed Marvel videogame would indeed feature Bruce Banner's trouser-bursting alter-ego, in a graphic text adventure rather than a console action game.

Published by Adventure International, *Questprobe Featuring The Hulk* was the first of three Marvel licences designed by Scott Adams, and would be followed by a game based on *Spider-Man*, and finally an adventure featuring the Thing and the Human Torch from *The Fantastic Four*. In *The Hulk* our hero had to round up a number of gems for the mysterious Chief Examiner, while battling mutant ants and a 'lesser' Marvel super-villain called Ultron. One of the odd things about the game though was that to get angry, players had to merely type 'BITE LIP' in what is possibly one of the most anti-climactic methods for Hulk transformation ever seen.

"I picked the characters for each game," Scott tells ▶



» [Atari 8-bit] The clairvoyant Madame Web in *Questprobe Featuring Spider-Man*.





Bluffer's guide

▶ us. "When I chose Hulk for the first one they suggested Spider-Man. I said since Spidey was their best title I wanted to work up to it and do Hulk first. They agreed. I am glad I did as I think Spidey was a better game than Hulk."

The *Questprobe* trilogy was notable for its use of graphics to illustrate the locations that the player visited, with sequences for events like the Hulk transforming or Spidey scaling buildings, and appearances by Marvel villains like Doctor Octopus and Doctor Doom. Scott even managed to cameo in the game himself in what was surely the first time a games designer had his likeness included within a licensed Marvel product. "When it came time to draw the main villain in the series they asked for my input," he laughs. "I told them it would be neat if they could use a likeness of me. They asked for a photo. I got back a reply. 'Yup he looks evil enough!'"

For each of the *Questprobe* games Marvel created a tie-in comic featuring talent like Bill Mantlo for *The Hulk*, Al Milgrom for *Spider-Man* and David Michelinie for *Human Torch And The Thing*. A fourth, but unreleased *Questprobe* title based on *X-Men* had a tie-in comic from series creator Chris Claremont which eventually appeared in the *Marvel Fanfare #33* comic. But unfortunately the next game licensed from Marvel had none of the flair and creativity of Scott Adams' short-lived collaboration with the comic book giant.

Howard The Duck: Adventure to Volcano Island was a videogame released to coincide with the first ever film based on a Marvel character.

> **"I THINK SPIDEY WAS A FAR BETTER GAME THAN HULK"**
> Scott Adams

Activision had scored a huge hit with its *Ghostbusters* movie tie-in, and was hoping for a repeat, but unfortunately the game was even dumber than the film. It's a sort of prequel to the movie, consisting of Howard wandering around an island trying to rescue his friends from the Dark Overlord through the power of Quack-Fu. Dull and frustrating, the game was awarded a paltry 19% in C64 review mag *Zzap!64*. A year later Captain America made his videogame debut, shortly followed by Marvel's iconic X-Men. *Captain America In The Doom Tube Of Dr. Megalomann* was created by Adventure Soft, the British developer that would later find success with *Simon The Sorceror*. Seemingly influenced by the Epyx title *Impossible Mission*, it gave players an hour in real time to fight through an underground base and disable a missile strike. Published by US Gold in Europe, ironically the game was never released stateside.

LJN's *The Uncanny X-Men* was the first videogame to feature Storm, Cyclops, Wolverine and company, and the first Marvel licence on Nintendo's NES console. It was an action game allowing players to choose from a roster of X-Men before attempting to stop a rampaging Magneto. Each playable character had different combat attributes – for example Wolverine and Colossus were the most powerful characters in hand-to-hand combat, Storm and Cyclops could use projectile attacks, and Nightcrawler had the ability to pass through objects. On their journey to battling Magneto players could expect to come up against bosses including ▶

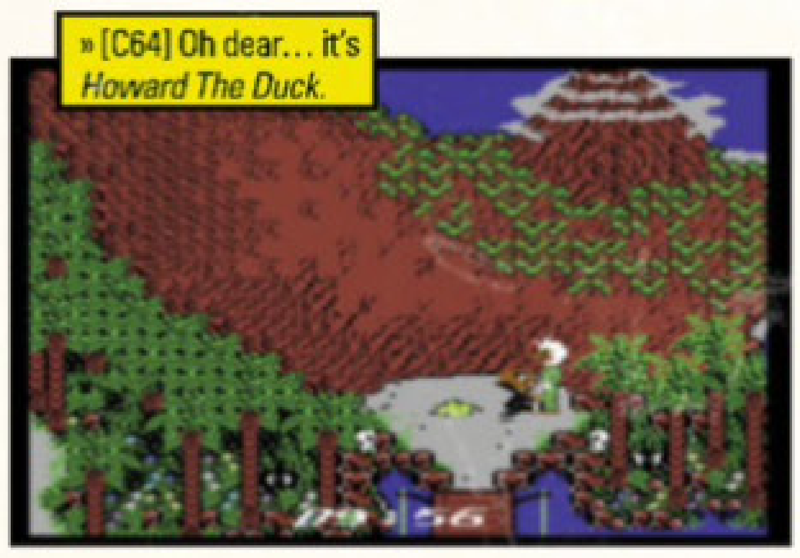


» [Atari ST] *Captain America In The Doom Tube Of Dr. Megalomann* featured a completely made up new villain…



» [NES] LJN's *X-Men* game was uncannily average.

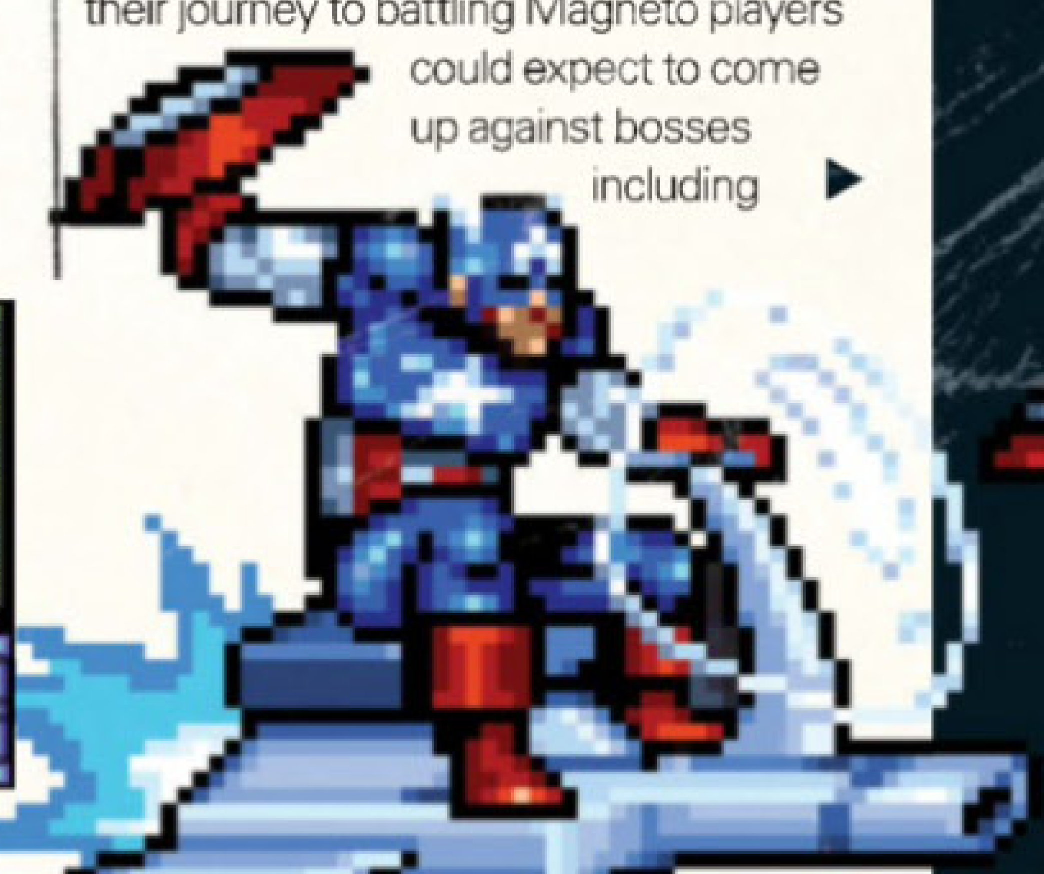


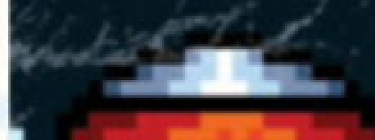


» [C64] Oh dear… it's *Howard The Duck*.



» [C64] *X-Men: Madness In Murderworld* focused on puzzles over action, perhaps too much.





SELECTED TIMELINE

1982 – SPIDER-MAN
■ Released for the Atari 2600 console, the debut Marvel videogame saw our friendly neighbourhood hero defusing bombs while battling the Green Goblin.

1984 – QUESTPROBE TRILOGY
■ A series of three graphic adventures by Scott Adams' Adventure International starring The Hulk, Spider-Man, The Human Torch and The Thing.

1986 – HOWARD THE DUCK
■ The first, and possibly the worst of many Marvel licences starred an extra-terrestrial wise-talking waterfowl.

1987 – CAPTAIN AMERICA IN THE DOOM TUBE OF DR. MEGALOMANN
■ The first videogame appearance of the patriotic superhero saw him fighting to save the world from nuclear annihilation.

1988 – THE UNCANNY X-MEN
■ This rather average release for the NES console was the first to feature Marvel's popular band of mutants.

SILVER SURFER
■ A scrolling NES shoot-'em-up based on the alien humanoid superhero. The first of several Marvel licences by Software Creations.

1982 · 1983 · 1984 · 1985 · 1986 · 1987 · 1988 · 1989







» [Amiga] George Bush Senior's bizarre appearance in *The Amazing Spider-Man And Captain America In Dr. Doom's Revenge*.


» [NES] *The Silver Surfer* seems to have been inspired by the shoot-'em-up *Gradius*.

SCOTT ADAMS



We speak to the creator of the first ever Marvel superhero adventure trilogy

HOW DID YOUR DEAL TO PRODUCE A SERIES OF MARVEL ADVENTURE GAMES COME ABOUT?

Joe Calamari was a VP at Marvel and he was constantly trying to expand Marvel's licensing. He set his sights on getting Marvel into the home computer market. He was told that Adventure International was the largest presence in that market.

WERE YOU A MARVEL FAN BEFORE WORKING ON THE GAMES?





Definitely! One of the points I put in the contract was that Marvel would provide me with a subscription to every title they were publishing. I received stacks of comics that I read every month. I also got a pre-release copy of *The Handbook Of The Marvel Universe* and I used it heavily during my game creations.

HOW DID YOU FIND WORKING WITH MARVEL?

They are an incredibly fantastic group. They had final say on the visual representations of the characters but I had complete freedom for the storylines I was doing. They did the ink and dialogue for the comic books; I did the games, except for the art. That was done by my graphic artists with approval from Marvel. I remember meeting Stan Lee, Jim Shooter and others and getting their autographs on my copy of the *Questprobe #1* comic.

WHICH WAS YOUR FAVOURITE GAME IN THE SERIES TO WORK ON?

Every game I ever wrote I tried to push the envelope and there was always something new from the last. In *Human Torch And The Thing*, for the first time in an any adventure game, you had to control two separate characters to complete the game. I thought it worked very well and it's my favourite of the series with Spidey my next favourite.

CAN YOU TELL US ANYTHING ABOUT THE UNRELEASED X-MEN QUESTPROBE ADVENTURE?

I was in the process of doing *X-Men* when AI closed its doors. This was a game that had you moving through a set of areas and if you mapped it would later show an image that would be required to be identified to finish the game. I later the map/image puzzle in my game *The Inheritance*, (see msadams.com).

1990

SPIDER-MAN VS. THE KINGPIN
■ Originally released for the Mega Drive, this platform action game became one of Sega's most successful Marvel licences.

CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE AVENGERS
■ Data East's four-player arcade beat-'em-up combined both hand-to-hand combat with occasional vehicle shoot-'em-up sequences.

1991

SPIDER-MAN: THE VIDEOGAME
■ A four-player scrolling arcade brawler and platform game by Sega with excellent comic-style visuals.

1992

X-MEN
■ Konami's six-player arcade beat-'em-up was the first game to capture the look and feel of the legendary Marvel series.

1993

THE PUNISHER
■ Capcom's first Marvel arcade game starred The Punisher and Nick Fury in an enjoyable *Final Fight*-style romp.

1994

X-MEN: CHILDREN OF THE ATOM
■ Drawing from its *Street Fighter* franchise, *COTA* was the first in a long line of Marvel 'versus' brawlers from Capcom.

SPIDER-MAN & VENOM: MAXIMUM CARNAGE
■ Software Creations' most successful Marvel licence saw Spider-Man and Venom teaming up to fight a deadly new threat.

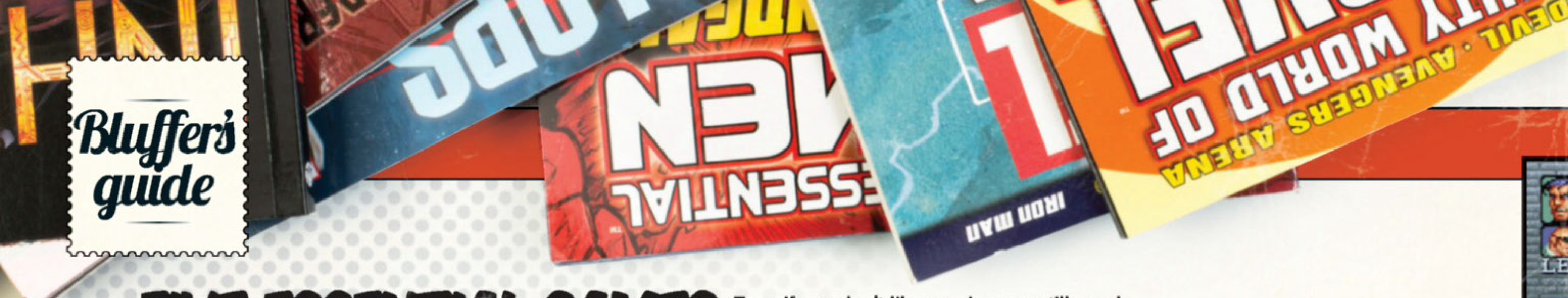
1995

MARVEL SUPER HEROES
■ Inspired by the *Infinity Gauntlet* comic book series, this Capcom versus fighter introduced characters like The Hulk, Iron Man and Spider-Man to the series.

1996

X-MEN VS. STREET FIGHTER
■ The first Capcom game to pit the its cast of warriors against Marvel characters, introducing the now-familiar tag team system.

1997



FIVE ESSENTIAL GAMES

Even if you don't like comics you still need to play these brilliant videogames

X-MEN

PLATFORM: Arcade, Various
YEAR: 1992

■ Recently re-released by Backbone Entertainment, the splendid comic book presentation and large animated characters of Konami's arcade game still impress. The six-player 2D fighting mayhem still offers plenty of enjoyment as Cyclops, Colossus, Wolverine, Storm, Nightcrawler and Dazzler unleash merry hell on Magneto and his henchmen.



MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 2

PLATFORM: Arcade, Various
YEAR: 2000

■ While the third game in the series is an essential purchase for fans, we have a soft spot for *MVC2*, being the last in the series to feature old-school 2D characters, superimposed over 3D backgrounds. The over-the-top screen-clearing specials are also less intrusive on the *Street Fighter*-style combat than its sequel.



SPIDER-MAN 2

PLATFORM: PS2, Xbox, GameCube **YEAR:** 2004

■ For those with a desire to swing through the streets of New York, this was the first game that really nailed the exhilarating freedom of movement depicted in Sam Raimi's trilogy. Treyarch created a Manhattan that was 'alive' for players to explore and the emphasis on soaring across the skyline over hand-to-hand combat is very refreshing.



THE INCREDIBLE HULK: ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION

PLATFORM: PS2, Xbox, GameCube **YEAR:** 2005

■ This is the gaming equivalent of that bit in Ang Lee's movie where Hulk goes ape on a bunch of military hardware. Cue lobbing jump-jets and destroying robots by smashing them to bits. With its large environments and a move set worthy of a Capcom fighting game, it's simply smashing.



MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

PLATFORM: Various **YEAR:** 2006

■ Before the Avengers assembled at the movies, Raven Software's *Ultimate Alliance* brought fan-favourites like Captain America, Wolverine, Daredevil and Thor together in an epic RPG for up to four players. With a large roster of heroes and super villains from Dr. Doom, Blackheart it offers hours of enjoyment for Marvel fans.





» [Arcade] Sega's *Spider-Man* arcade game captured the look of the comic-book artwork beautifully.

Sabretooth, Juggernaut and Emma Frost. The game's overhead view didn't capture the look or feel of the comics. LJN produced several more Marvel NES games including a standalone title featuring Wolverine, but the game was frustratingly difficult, and after several other similarly lacklustre Marvel titles LJN became a name to be avoided after spying its logo on the packaging.

Pennsylvania-based Paragon Software also acquired the rights to produce an *X-Men* game, *X-Men: Madness In* *Murderworld*, a side-scrolling adventure set in a bizarre theme park. Players could switch between six characters (Wolverine, Storm, Cyclops, Dazzler, Colossus and Nightcrawler) to overcome various puzzles they encountered while attempting to rescue Professor X from the clutches of Magneto. The company also released the dual-billing *The Amazing Spider-Man* and *Captain America In Dr. Doom's Revenge*, a side-scroller where players alternated between controlling its two comic book heroes. One curious aspect of this game is that it includes a bizarre ending where a digitised George Bush Sr. congratulates the heroes on defeating the metal-masked threat. Paragon's standalone *Spider-Man* title, *The Amazing Spider-Man*, a game set in a film studio where Peter Parker had to rescue Mary Jane from Mysterio. Paragon was also responsible for creating the first videogame based on *The Punisher*, released by Microprose in 1990.

1998

MARVEL VS. CAPCOM

■ Adding classic Capcom characters like Morrigan and Strider, this beat-'em-up had a focus on spectacular screen-filling team specials.

1999

2000

X-MEN: MUTANT ACADEMY

■ Appearing on the PlayStation, this was the first Marvel fighting game to feature three-dimensional characters. A sequel followed it in 2001.

MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 2

■ This spectacular fighting sequel added the ability to play with three man tag-teams picked from an impressive roster of 56 playable characters.

2001

2002

2003

HULK

■ Eric Bana reprised his role in this tie-in for Ang Lee's arthouse superhero flick, but it's wasn't a patch on 2005's *Ultimate Destruction* game.

2004

SPIDER-MAN 2

■ Based on the movie, this action adventure allowed players to harness the true web-swinging powers of Spider-Man in an open-world New York.

X-MEN LEGENDS

■ This *Diablo*-style role-playing game offered support for up to four players, and an unlockable cast of up to 15 playable mutant characters.

2005

THE PUNISHER

■ Loosely based on the 2004 movie, this third-person shooter lived up to its name in terms of its dark, violence-filled storyline and gruesome torture system.





» [Arcade] Nick Fury and chum dispensing lethal justice in Capcom's *The Punisher*.

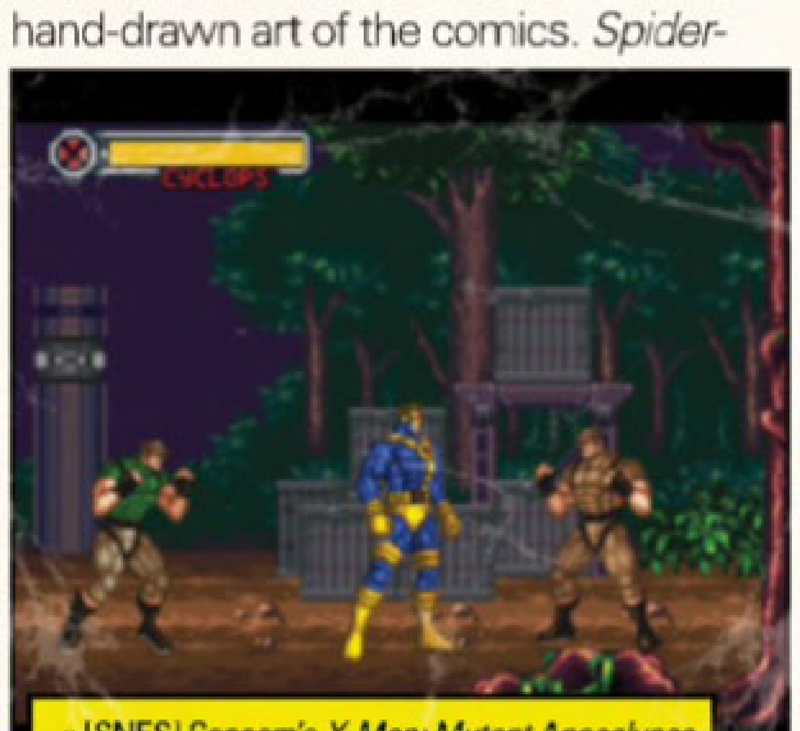


» [SNES] Getting hands-on with some perps in *Spider-Man/Venom: Maximum Carnage*.



» [SNES] It's not easy being green in Probe's *The Incredible Hulk*.

The Silver Surfer got a game of his own the same year, courtesy of UK-based Software Creations. Released on the NES, *The Silver Surfer* took the form of a shoot-'em-up combining vertical and horizontally-scrolling stages. But it was in the arcades where the most exciting Marvel videogames were beginning to surface. *Captain America And The Avengers*, a side-scrolling beat-'em-up from Japanese coin-op manufacturer Data East, allowed up to four people to battle the forces of the evil Red Skull. Players could pick to fight in the guise of the shield-toting Captain, Iron Man, Hawkeye or Vision. Along with Sega's *Spider-Man* arcade game it was one of the first games to capture the hand-drawn art of the comics. *Spider-man* was the more visually impressive game, lovingly emulating the shading and ink stylings of the original Marvel publications. With the option to play as Spidey, Hawkeye, Black Cat or Namor The Sub-Mariner, the game was notable for its alternating combat and platform stages that zoomed in and out with the help of the System 32 arcade hardware.



» [SNES] Capcom's *X-Men: Mutant Apocalypse* was the first of its Marvel console releases.

Arguably the best of all the Marvel-related coin-ops was the *X-Men* scrolling fighting game by Konami. Inspired by the animated TV series, *Pryde Of The X-Men*'s deluxe version housed two monitors and space for up to six players to battle armies of Sentinels and Magneto's assorted cohorts. Konami's *X-Men* looked fantastic, with massive on-screen characters, slick animation and great special effects, especially when unleashing a 'Mutant Power' like Storm's hurricane. And who could forget Magneto yelling "WELCOME TO DIE!" when you finally came face-to-face with him? Released the following year, Capcom's *The Punisher* was another quality arcade beat-'em-up styled after the company's popular *Final Fight*. With vibrant, highly detailed artwork and colourful cartoon ▶

MARVEL BY NUMBERS

Facts and figures about the comic book heroes

26 Games featuring The Hulk

Thor pops up in **16** games

Lego Marvel Super Heroes was released on **12** systems

The first Spider-Man game appeared in **1982**

Iron Man has featured in **27** games

83% The Metacritic Rating for Spider-Man 2

57 Games that feature Spider-Man

Marvel Super Heroes had **12** playable characters

2006 – MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

■ Along with its 2009 sequel, this role-playing title offered the most impressive character roster of any Marvel-license outside the *Marvel Vs. Capcom* series.

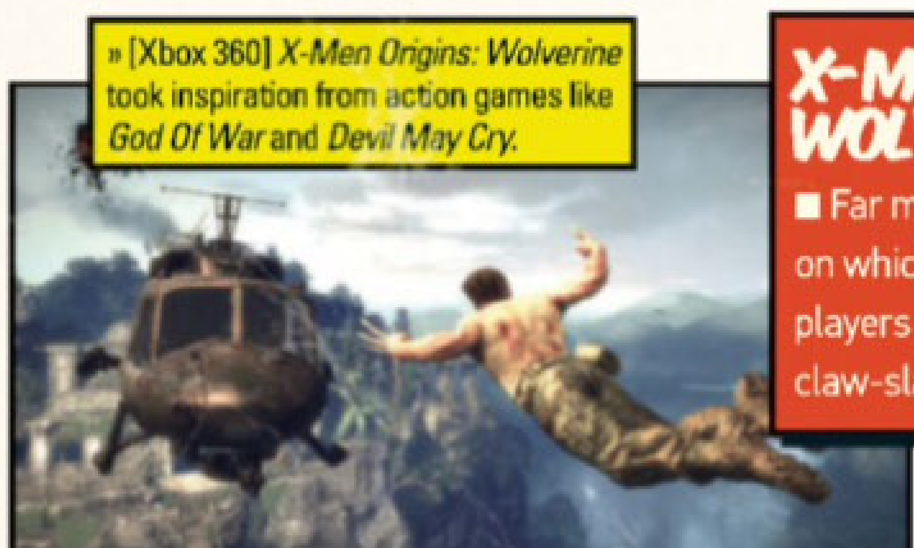
2009 – CAPTAIN AMERICA: SUPER SOLDIER

■ Set entirely in a *Wolfenstein*-like castle with hordes of Nazis to pummel, this third-person brawler was another surprisingly enjoyable film licence.

2011 – MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 3

■ Like the new generation *Street Fighter* titles, *MVC 3* featured 3D character models, replacing the 2D sprites of the previous games.

2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013



» [Xbox 360] *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* took inspiration from action games like *God Of War* and *Devil May Cry*.

2009 – X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE

■ Far more entertaining than the movie on which it was based, this game gave players a truly visceral taste of Logan's claw-slashing abilities.

2013 – DEADPOOL

■ With voice talent from Nolan 'Nathan Drake' North, Marvel's sock-headed merc got his own game with this amusingly self-aware beat-'em-up.

2013 – LEGO MARVEL SUPER HEROES

■ Boasting around 150 characters from the comic book universe and even a cameo from a Lego Stan Lee, this is the best Marvel tie-in for the new consoles.





» [Arcade] Magneto and Cyclops face off in *X-Men Vs. Street Fighter.*

▶ violence it improved on *Final Fight* by focusing on the use of a multitude of weapons, from pistols and baseball bats to grenades and Uzis. The game marked the first appearance of crime overlord Kingpin as the main villain, and alongside the eponymous Frank Castle a second player could fill the boots of the cigar-chomping S.H.I.E.L.D. agent Nick Fury.

The bloated mobster would make another appearance in *The Amazing Spider-Man Vs. The Kingpin*, the first Marvel licence to appear on the new Sega Mega-CD. This side-scrolling platform game showcased many popular Spider-Man villains including Venom, Dr. Octopus, Sandman, The Lizard and Electro. Starting life on the Mega Drive/Genesis console, *The Amazing Spider-Man Vs. The Kingpin* was one of the biggest-selling home Spidey games yet. According to developer Randall Reiss about two-thirds of Sega console owners purchased a copy, persuading Marvel not to cancel its licence with the company. Sega's handheld console, the Game Gear, became the recipient of several further Marvel tie-ins including the *Spider-Man* spin-off *Return Of The Sinister Six* and two *X-Men* titles. The Incredible Hulk also got his first action game on the Game Gear, Mega Drive and SNES courtesy of the UK's Probe Entertainment. It was a well-received platform romp praised by critics for it graphics, animation and imaginative bosses, including the likes of Abomination, Rhino and Tyrannus.

Spider-Man & Venom: Maximum Carnage was another popular Mega Drive title and the second Marvel release on the platform for Software Creations. Rather than based on the general Marvel comic book universe it took its inspiration from a miniseries in which Peter Parker and Eddie Brock's alter egos form an uneasy truce to fight Carnage, a symbiote spawned from Venom. Artist Ste Pickford also worked on the company's previous Marvel licence *Spider-Man And The X-Men in Arcade's Revenge*, a title that didn't quite turn out as its developer had hoped. "We pitched the idea of making *Spider-Man And The X-Men* into a *Final Fight* style beat-'em-up, with big characters, the flat colours and strong black outlines of the American superhero comics I had grown up with," says Ste. "Unfortunately our concept was rejected, and when the game came out nobody was especially happy with it. So for *Maximum Carnage* we argued to make the big, bold beat-'em-up with comic-style graphics that we'd suggested last time around." The game was successful enough to receive a sequel in the form of *Venom/Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety* featuring cameos from Captain America, Ghost Rider, Hawkeye and Daredevil.

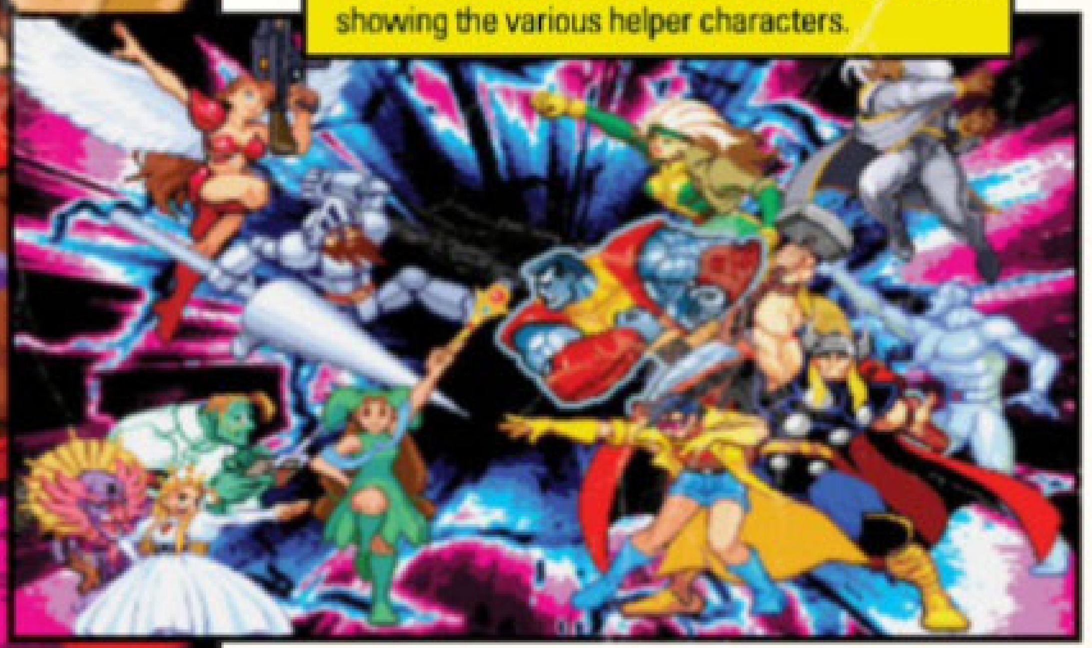
"When the game came out nobody was happy with it"

Ste Pickford on *Spider-Man And The X-Men*

While Capcom flirted with the SNES console, creating solid platform games like *X-Men:* *Mutant Apocalypse* and *Marvel Super Heroes in War of the Gems*, its greatest accomplishment came from harnessing the popularity of its arcade smash, *Street Fighter*. Its approach was to take the already superhuman combat of its perennial fighting franchise and allow players to leap higher and hit harder than ever before. The first release in the new Marvel fighting game franchise, *X-Men: Children of the Atom*, featured voice talent from cast members of the animated *X-Men* TV series. It gave fans the chance to play as six of the most popular mutant heroes, or take on the role of villains including the Silver Samurai, Omega Red, and even a massive Sentinel. It was the game that unleashed the true wrath of Wolverine's adamantium claws and Collosus's mighty body-slams with an action-packed combat system focused on aerial combos and 'Super Jumps'. The game's environments also paid close attention to the *X-Men* universe, such as the stage on top of the Blackbird and the Danger Room facility in Xavier's mansion.

Children Of The Atom was the first Marvel arcade game to receive near-perfect home ports on the Sega Saturn and PlayStation, along with Capcom's next release, *Marvel Super Heroes*, which included iconic characters such as Hulk, Captain America, Spider-Man and Iron Man. A new feature for this game was the Infinity Gem system, which allowed players to receive enhanced abilities for a short time by performing special actions against opponents while battling towards the showdown with




» [Arcade] Attract screens for *Marvel Vs. Capcom* showing the various helper characters.



Matthew Rhoades

We chat to the writer/ designer of the excellent videogame, Spider-Man 2

Was creating the open-world structure of the game a difficult task?

At the time that we made *Spider-Man 2*, there were almost no open world games. *GTA3* was a new game when the first *Spider-Man* movie game came out, and *Vice City* arrived in the early stages of *Spider-Man 2*, so there weren't a lot of models for us to draw on. We had to figure how large-scale our New York could be and then the city had to be designed.

Did you take any inspiration from previous Marvel-themed games?

For the first movie game, we modelled our experience on Neversoft's original *Spider-Man* for the PlayStation. Because we were making the game for the PS2, Gamecube and Xbox, we had the ability to create more open spaces, so we took advantage of that to make swinging much less of a limited experience. The thing that changed everything for us was the first *Spider-Man* movie. We had a chance to see an advance screening and I think everyone in that theatre was blown away by the way the web-swinging had been visualised. The kinetic movement, the sense of physicality… we looked at what was on-screen and what was in our game and said, 'we have to step it up.' We started working on *Spider-Man 2* straight after seeing the first film.

Was there a decision to focus on web swinging over combat with enemies in the game?

Absolutely. Everyone who saw that first movie walked away saying 'web-swinging.' We looked at a whole different genre of games and started thinking of *Spider-Man* as an extreme sports star as much as a superhero. You can see that influence all over the place in the second game – the air tricks, and the charge jump, for example. And it's the whole reason we needed an open city. Spidey needed a playground big enough to accommodate his swinging. It was a big investment of resources, and it meant spending less time on other aspects but I think it was the right call.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT SUPERHERO GAME?

The key elements that make a superhero game fantastic fun



HEROES AND VILLIANS

■ From Spider-Man and Venom to the X-Men and Magneto, the eternal struggle between a superhero and his nemesis is an essential requirement for many titles.

ASSEMBLING THE TEAM

■ The chance to take a customised team of your favourite heroes into battle is what makes games like *Marvel Vs. Capcom* and *Marvel Ultimate Alliance* so great.

EPIC TALES

■ While we wouldn't expect anything as awesome as the second *X-Men* film, good writing goes a long way, from Scott Adams' *Questprobe* adventures to Telltale Games' forthcoming releases. We hope.

COMIC BOOK PIXELS

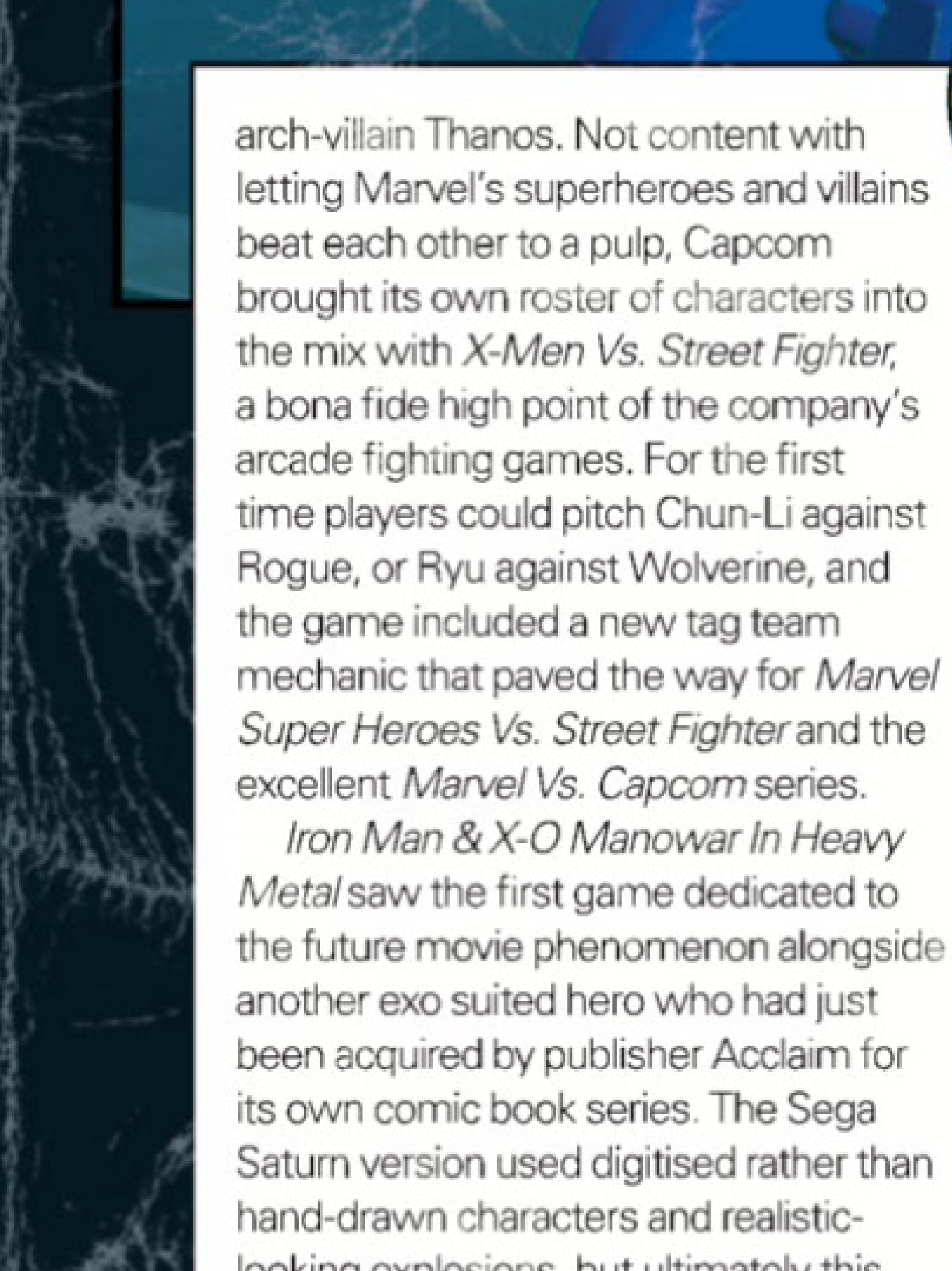
■ We have a soft spot for older 2D games such as the arcade *X-Men* and *Marvel Vs. Capcom* that brought to life the hand-drawn ink stylings of the classic comics.

WITH GREAT POWER…

■ Unlike the films or comics, videogames let *you* unleash the web-shooters, laser blasts and earthquake-sized smashes of your Marvel favourites.

arch-villain Thanos. Not content with letting Marvel's superheroes and villains beat each other to a pulp, Capcom brought its own roster of characters into the mix with *X-Men Vs. Street Fighter*, a bona fide high point of the company's arcade fighting games. For the first time players could pitch Chun-Li against Rogue, or Ryu against Wolverine, and the game included a new tag team mechanic that paved the way for *Marvel Super Heroes Vs. Street Fighter* and the excellent *Marvel Vs. Capcom* series.

Iron Man & X-O Manowar In Heavy Metal saw the first game dedicated to the future movie phenomenon alongside another exo suited hero who had just been acquired by publisher Acclaim for its own comic book series. The Sega Saturn version used digitised rather than hand-drawn characters and realistic-looking explosions, but ultimately this platform shoot-'em-up failed to impress critics. The power of new consoles like the PlayStation and N64 now allowed for full-3D games like *X-Men Mutant Academy*, a *Tekken*-style fighting game, and Neversoft's *Spider-Man*, built around the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* game engine. The early Noughties onwards became the era of big-screen Marvel adaptations as films like *Spider-Man*, Blade and *Hulk* appeared at theatres. Perhaps the finest was Treyarch's *Spider-Man 2* movie tie-in, which realised the childhood dreams of many a Spidey fan to web-swing through the streets of an open world New York City in three dimensions.



» [Xbox 360] *Captain America: Super Soldier* – even Indy didn't hate Nazis this much.

Other notable titles of the decade were Raven Software's *X-Men: Legends* and *Marvel: Ultimate* *Alliance* franchises, both co-op action-RPGs that evoked the spirit of old-school dungeon-crawlers like *Gauntlet* and *Diablo*. The two *Ultimate Alliance* games in particular included a huge roster of playable Marvel characters, many of which had never fought together in a videogame before. For many fans, one of the most exciting recent releases was *Marvel Vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds*, the first of Capcom's tagteam superhero fighting games to feature full 3D graphics. Like its prequels, it sported a mind-boggling array of playable characters, from stalwarts like Thor and Iron Man to new additions like She-Hulk and Phoenix. And of course it was possible to pitch Marvel's offspring against Capcom stalwarts like Mike Hagger, Jill Valentine or Viewtiful Joe, creating massive onscreen super-attacks as three-strong teams of mighty combatants combined forces.

While we've seen a glut of Marvel movie tie-ins in the last few years, the most entertaining probably being the spin-offs from *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* and *Captain America: The First Avenger*, Marvel's current big movie cash-cow, *The Avengers*, has surprisingly not had any direct movie-based games for either of its film versions. Perhaps the closest interactive release is *Lego Marvel Super Heroes*, which although aimed at a younger, child-friendly market provides enough fan service and unlockable characters to keep the most avid adult Marvel junkie entertained. Perhaps the most exciting recent news on the Marvel gaming front though is that Telltale Games, of *The Walking Dead* and *Game Of Thrones* fame, are set to produce a new series of adventures based on the Marvel universe. It's a fact that certainly pleases original *Questprobe* creator Scott Adams. "I can't wait to see what they do with them…" he tells us. Nor can we. *



» [GameCube] Four-player co-op dungeon crawling in *X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse*.







» RETROREVIVAL

Shenmue

GAMES YOU LOVED'S CHRIS HILL REVISITS THE DREAMCAST CLASSIC

» DREAMCAST » SEGA AM2 » 1999

When I first had my Dreamcast I discovered Yu Suzuki, who was a legend of the Eighties arcade scene, was making *Shenmue* and it became a must-have title for me. From the very beginning you feel like you are in a movie – thanks to its dramatic opening and powerful score beating to the drum of Ryo's father's death.

Playing as Ryo, you take on his persona as a young man fighting for justice and revenge against the evil Lan Di and his henchmen. You also get the chance to explore Shenmue's world with every little detail covered – whether it be buying a coke from a vending machine or simply watching the sun set every night to a classy musical sequence. Living in *Shenmue* is part of the fun. Men in black cars, mysterious clues and visits to the You Arcade where you can play a game of darts or jump on Sega's *Hang On* form part of this experience and it's an experience that few games at the time could offer.

Even when you know there's a task ahead, you don't feel compelled to rush through like in many modern open world adventure games. Instead you take a trip into Tomato Convenience Store and browse, or simply go to work and drive a forklift truck.

Training is key, too – the fighting system is fairly easy to master and there's an awesome 70-person battle towards the end where you will need all your skills. QTE sequences come into play periodcially as part of the action, further blurring the lines between game and movie.

So immerse yourself and seek out Lan Di and the Phoenix Mirror. Along the way just make sure you find time for a game of *Lucky Hit*. Amazingly, *Shenmue III* is finally happening thanks to a brand new Kickstarter, which will continue Ryo's gripping story. It's due in late 2017 and you can track its progress here: kickstarter.com/projects/ysnet/shenmue-3. *

Diddy Kong Racing

Inspired by Mario 64 as much as Mario Kart, Diddy Kong Racing sold millions worldwide. Rory Milne asks Lee Schuneman, Kev Bayliss, John Pegg and Richard Gale about their adventure-racer hybrid



D*iddy Kong Racing* wasn't always called *Diddy Kong Racing*. In fact, Lee Schuneman, the game's producer, wasn't even making a racer until a member of the development team stuck a mammoth on a moped. "We didn't have much playable," Lee begins, "but Lee Musgrave had come up with a woolly mammoth riding on a moped for some random reason and Chris Stamper decided we should stop doing [an] RTS and make a racer instead."

After switching genres, Lee's project was initially named *Wild Cartoon Kingdom* and then *Adventure Racers* around which time artist Kev Bayliss, coders John Pegg and Richard Gale, and others joined his team. "They were just different titles as the game evolved," explains Lee, "many aspects like being able to roam the central world were all there from the start of the concept, and what really evolved as we progressed were the racing mechanics – like drifting – and challenges." Kev's initial role on *Adventure Racers* was as character artist. "I was involved in the game at an early stage, when the team was relatively small, to help with the direction of the characters," he says. John remembers a badger protagonist and expensive hardware, "I recall *Adventure Racers* featuring Bumper on the title screen. All of our development was done using Silicon Graphics workstations – very much state of the art at the time – [with] internal expansion boards containing N64 development hardware." Richard dates his involvement as post-*Wild Cartoon Kingdom*, "I did work on *Adventure Racers* – development was all command-line based and custom tools."

Lee's expanded team soon gained approval for their project to go into development, renamed *Pro-Am 64* after Rare's NES classic. "Chris Stamper – who was software engineering on the RTS – made the decision, and that was it! We started it in probably August/September 1996. A decision was made that this game was going to be Rare published rather than Nintendo published hence using a Rare IP for the name. *RC Pro-Am* had been successful – having a name that people recognise always helps." Kev adds, "*Adventure Racers* was always going to be a fun, cute racing game, and so taking the 'toy' element from *RC Pro-Am* – they were radio controlled cars – and building upon that seemed to make sense."



» [N64] Taj the Genie offers post-race advice and magically changes the player's vehicle on request.

> **"We wanted to push the adventure element of the concept"**
> Kev Bayliss

But rather than cars, *Pro-Am 64*'s team favoured karts, planes and hovercrafts, although not before Kev considered trikes. "We wanted to create a feeling that you were controlling toddlers on trikes. But they just didn't feel right to race in the game, and they didn't look right either," he says.

Given his project was greenlit shortly before *Mario Kart 64*'s release, it would be reasonable for Lee to take inspiration from Nintendo's racer, but the producer's influences lay elsewhere. "We hadn't seen *Mario Kart 64*, my inspirations were *Mario Kart on the* SNES and *Mario 64*," he highlights. Kev expands on *Mario 64*'s influence, "we wanted to push the adventure element of the concept. We wanted to see if we could move the genre into another direction."

Kev also recollects other Rare projects that proved influential in shaping *Pro-Am 64*'s character line-up: "As we were developing other titles at the same time that were about to launch with their own main characters, such as Conker and Banjo, we thought it would be a great idea to bundle them into the game."

A more unlikely inspiration explains *Pro-Am 64* being structured around a central area connected to themed worlds. "It was inspired by theme park design, I've always loved the work of the Disney Imagineers," enthuses Lee.

Asked about the themes chosen for *Pro-Am 64*'s worlds, Lee says their platforming elements gave him license to follow design conventions. "It all comes back to the core concept of this being a platformer world, but with racing, so of course there needed to be fire world, desert world [and] snow world – all the usual suspects!" Kev reveals some ▶





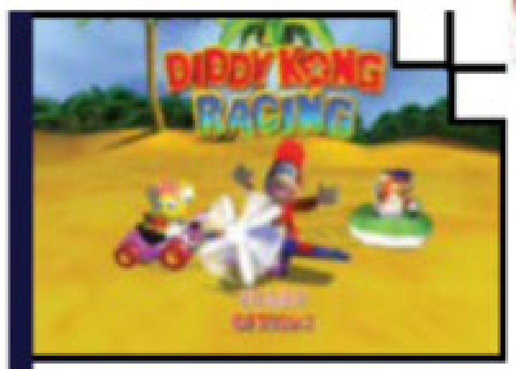
» [N64] Bumper eyeballs Diddy Kong on the Jungle Falls track while challenging Banjo for fifth place.



» [N64] Targeting Banjo on one of Crescent Island's sharp bends proves too much for Diddy.



» [N64] Competitors must hatch three eggs in a nest to win the Fire Mountain battle stage.



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** Nintendo
- » **DEVELOPER:** Rare Ltd
- » **RELEASED:** 1997
- » **PLATFORM:** N64
- » **GENRE:** Adventure-racer



DIDDY KONG RACING 101

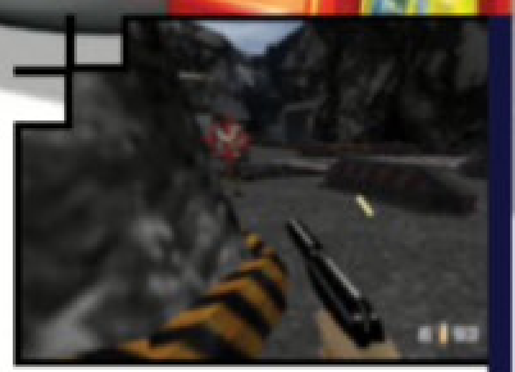
■ Primarily a racer in gameplay terms, *Diddy Kong Racing* is defined as much by the cutscene storyline and collection-based challenges of its Adventure Mode. Success in these challenges – and winning races – unlocks a plethora of extra content such as additional courses, boss races, battle stages and a bonus world.







» [N64] Diddy Kong drifts around one of the tighter bends in Dino Domain's Ancient Lake course.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

GOLDENEYE 007
(PICTURED)
SYSTEM: N64
YEAR: 1997

BANJO-KAZOOIE
SYSTEM: N64
YEAR: 1998

CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY
SYSTEM: N64
YEAR: 2001



▶ plans for the game's desert world. "The dinosaur areas were going to have more in the way of racing beneath stampeding Brontosauruses and across the backs of huge dinosaurs," he highlights. "I don't think we went that far due to the capabilities of the system."

As well as world design, *Pro-Am 64*'s racing aspect required track design, a multi-staged process initiated by Lee. "All the designs were done on paper. I would sketch them out and then one of the artists would build them in polygons," he remembers. "We'd get them into the game engine fast and start driving around. We would go back and fore, a little fine-tuning, and then I would have a tool that enabled me to edit props. The key to each track was that we played every one until [it was] perfect." Kev explains how the tracks were designed to encourage adventuring: "We were very particular about making the tracks nice to look at and almost try to lure the player off the main circuit to explore each environment by trying to ensure that every [aspect] of the tracks looked interesting and involving."

> **"The key to each track was that we played every one until it was perfect"**
> Lee Schuneman

As *Pro-Am 64*'s worlds and tracks evolved so did the AI governing of its cast of competitors, which Lee likens to tabletop racing. "There were four 'lanes' – kind of like Scalectrix – and each lane was a different path around the track, some fast and others slow," he explains. "As you drove around you were 'rubber banded' to the other AI so they always felt close. However, for the highly-skilled we broke the rubber band so the others couldn't catch you up." John notes how each AI racer was made to feel distinct: "Each character had their own performance attributes that could be easily tweaked – for example, top speed, acceleration and rate of turn."

The addition of visually stunning power-ups and weapons helped *Pro-Am 64* realise its platforming aspirations – often in hilarious style. "There were certainly some clichéd *Wacky Races*-style weapons!" grins Kev. John elaborates, "the lead programmer, Rob Harrison, implemented the weapons and power-ups. Paul Mountain wrote the software for some of the associated graphical effects – like the shields and boost cones, [these] were 3D models with code to control their animation."

Pro-Am 64's adventure aspect required Kev to create a series of cutscenes that formed a storyline. "Lead software engineer Rob Harrison worked on a animation editor that was tailored to suit the game," says Kev. "I told Rob what I needed to create sequences, and he created an editor for characters to follow motion paths. I could flag up special effects, sound effects, and move the camera around anywhere. This was then used to create story sequences."

Collection-based challenges and unlockable competitors and tracks helped broaden *Pro-Am 64*'s gameplay and increase its replay value. "We wanted something that would take a while to complete," reasons Kev, "by adding the unlockable content I think we added longevity to the game's life and fun factor." John admits: "I remember the Greenwood Village silver coin challenge being particularly hard – I just couldn't complete it. Tim Stamper's son managed it, and rang me up to ridicule me. He must've only been about ten!"

Unsurprisingly, perfecting a platforming world of racing tracks replete with polygon racers on unfamiliar hardware provided challenges. "For quite a few of us, it was our first game and we had a lot to learn," concedes John. "Even for the team members



» [N64] Boss Bluey the Walrus invites the player to race in an Adventure Mode cutscene.

» [N64] Future Fun Land's Darkmoon Caverns features a pair of high-octane loop the loops.



» [N64] Timber loses fifth place to Diddy as the cheeky monkey cuts corners in Star City.



» [N64] A shielded Diddy avoids losing one of four lives in the Darkwater Beach battle stage.



» [N64] A magnet power-up moves Diddy up a position in Sherbet Island's Pirate Lagoon.



who'd worked at Rare for a while it was quite a transition moving to the N64. In particular, the artists were having to learn how to produce 3D models that were simple enough that they could be rendered and animated by the N64 hardware in real-time."

As the team strived to make *Pro-Am 64* run faster, a clever compromise saw them trade polygons for sprites. "I personally liked the sprite wheels, plane propellers and hovercraft fans," reflects Kev. "This reduced the poly count for each vehicle creating a solid look on a relatively low number of triangles." John offers: "There was definitely a lot of effort that went into making [the game] mostly polygon based. Each vehicle / character combination was modelled at several levels of detail so as they moved further away from the camera they switched to a simpler model."

The spring of 1997 saw Lee demo *Pro-Am 64* to E3 attendees including Shigeru Miyamoto, which led to the racer gaining a new frontman. "My main memory is the reaction to the Tick Tock character for time trial – Miyamoto liked him! I imagine it was at this time that the *Diddy Kong* conversations happened with Nintendo and the Stampers."

A rebranding of *Pro-Am 64* as *Diddy Kong Racing* posed Lee's team few problems while raising their game's profile, but delays on Rare's intended Christmas title, *Banjo Kazooie,* handed them a challenging deadline. "By using Diddy, we had a strong brand, which helped to make the game what it was," Kev says of the rebrand. On festive deadlines, John remembers: "Everyone pulled out all the stops – we worked crazy hours to get it finished, but the team pulled together brilliantly."

Hard graft bolstered by an advertising blitz befitting a Rare Xmas release ensured phenomenal critical and commercial success for *Diddy Kong Racing.* "We had a great game with *Pro-Am 64,* but with the name change and marketing dollars it became a five million seller," Lee beams. "We were proud of the impact in Japan where I believe it went to number one." John comments on the game's critical success: "We'd been developing *DKR* in secret, so there'd been no build up in the press. I remember picking up the issue of a Nintendo magazine where *DKR* was revealed – that was the first article we'd seen, and the response was fantastic."

Asked for final thoughts, Richard succinctly offers: "To this day, I still get a buzz when I meet people that grew up with *DKR.*" John ends on a note of pride: "I'm still immensely proud of what we achieved, and it's great that people still play it." Kev has only happy memories: "It was one of most fun games I worked on – it was a fab team to be involved with." Lee's last words on *Diddy Kong Racing* are heartfelt: "None of us knew what we were doing, but we loved every second of making it. It's still fun to play, and I look back with fond memories." *



Thanks to Lee, Kev, John and Richard for sharing their stories from the *DKR* barn.

MEMORABLE MASCOT RACERS

More flagship character racing games

MARIO KART 64

■ SYSTEM: N64 ■ YEAR: 1996

In order to run at top speed, *Mario Kart 64* mixes polygon courses with pre-rendered sprite karts. Although geared more towards multiplayer than its predecessor and weighted in favour of the AI competitors, the game's immersive worlds and polished tracks provide a stylish racer that's still enjoyable to play solo.



MEGA MAN BATTLE & CHASE

■ SYSTEM: PlayStation ■ YEAR: 1997

Cleverly adapting the main series' mechanic of claiming your opponent's abilities, *Battle & Chase* rewards victories with the chance to strip defeated racers' vehicles of their parts. Aside from Mega Man, various series regulars are playable, with power-ups being obtained by running over various obstacles.



BOMBERMAN FANTASY RACE

■ SYSTEM: PlayStation ■ YEAR: 1998

Given that *Bomberman* is maze-based, it's unsurprising that *Fantasy Race* ditches the franchise's mechanics in favour of conventional racing gameplay. Bomberman still attacks his foes with bombs, but while racing on Louies and Tirras, which can be traded for other mounts using race winnings.



CRASH TEAM RACING

■ SYSTEM: PlayStation ■ YEAR: 1999

Clearly influenced by *Diddy Kong Racing,* Naughty Dog put its own spin on Rare's established formula to ensure their final *Crash Bandicoot* title stood apart from its more wholesome muse. Imaginative power-ups, kinetic gameplay and sumptuous visuals mark *Crash Team Racing* out as a must-play racer.



KONAMI KRAZY RACERS

■ SYSTEM: GBA ■ YEAR: 2001

A spiritual successor to *Super Mario Kart* of sorts, Konami's game uses a Mode 7-type technique to render its tracks. *Krazy Racers* features not one but a dozen franchise favourites from Konami such as Gray Fox, Vic Viper and Dracula. The title delivers short but sweet courses and well-balanced weapons and power-ups.



Minority Report

CLASSIC GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

PLAYSTATION

With over 4000 games released in the console's lifespan, there was a lot of games that were forgotten. Jonny Dimaline tries to fix that injustice and give some of those games a chance in the spotlight

SLAP HAPPY RHYTHM BUSTERS

■ DEVELOPER:POLYGON MAGIC ■ YEAR: 2000

■ On first sight, it's clear to anyone that *Slap Happy Rhythm Busters* is an amazing looking game, easily among the top ten great looking games for the PlayStation, in fact. This is mainly thanks to the excellent graffiti-punk aesthetic that permeates every part of it, from the characters designs and stages, right down to the menus and comic strip loading screens. There are very bright colours, and a kind of 'chunkiness' to everything that makes the game and its world radiate a feeling of energetic fun. The game that this style is often associated with is the Dreamcast's *Jet Set Radio*. Amazingly, Sega's game and *Slap Happy Rhythm Busters* were actually released in Japan on the very same day.

The character designs are all very appealing and mostly manage to avoid being variations on generic fighting game stereotypes, with the only exception being the very Chun Li-esque chinese kung fu fighter, Mia. Among them there's Vivian and Roxy, two short girls who count as a single character that take turns riding on each other's backs and throwing each other at their opponents. There's also Trash, who is some kind of rockstar binman, and Oreg, a sort of enormous man/taxi hybrid. Though the character designs are visually original, there are a few concepts that seem borrowed from other games, such as the androgynous Garia and her big floating sword



» [PlayStation] The developers definitely never felt any need to hold back on this game's colour palettes.



» [PlayStation] The *Dance Dance Revolution*-esque rhythm combos are the game's big gimmick, and they can feel unfair to the recipient.



» [PlayStation] Garia throws her big sword around in a style not dissimilar to Donovan from the *Darkstalkers* games.



» [PlayStation] With the game's cartoon style, even fighting a chainsaw-weilding giant in a butcher's shop looks like fun!

being reminiscent of *Darkstalkers*' Donovan, and another character, a graffiti artist named Tomtom who can summon living graffiti art that looks a lot like the 'Stands' present in *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure*.

The big gameplay gimmick of *SHRB* is that, along with the typical super moves that have been in almost every fighting game since *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*. Each character can, when their super meter is completely full, activate a rhythm combo, that temporarily turns the game into a miniature version of *Dance Dance Revolution*, with the aggressor matching button presses to arrows on-screen to cause more damage. The downside of this is that once it begins, the defending player can't really do much except hope that the other player has poor timing. Despite that, though, we're surprised that it's a concept that hasn't really been used in other fighting games before or since. Rhythm combos aside, the fighting in *SHRB* is generally a lot of fun. Hits are satisfyingly crunchy, combos are simple enough to put together and the general over the top, super-colourful look to everything makes every fight look like a pretty exciting cartoon, with the excellently modelled and textured graphics doing an excellent job of sneakily hiding the low polygon count. This is a game that wouldn't look entirely out of place on Sega's Dreamcast, it looks that good.

You can probably already guess this, but *Slap Happy Rhythm Busters* is a game you should definitely try to get a hold of, should the opportunity arise. It's fun, it looks great and it's pretty unique – which is a rarity in the fighting game genre.

IN DEPTH



SUPER METER
■ Regular super moves only cost one bar overall, but filling up all three segments allows use of the game's trademark *Dance Dance Revolution*-esque Rhythm Combos.

UNIQUE STYLE
■ A large part of the game's appeal is its looks and art style, both the backgrounds and the characters have a heavily stylised, urban aesthetic to them.

VARIED CHARACTERS
■ The game's roster eschews the typical martial artist, with characters ranging from cowgirls to pairs of twins and a homeless man's dog.

GREAT SOUND
■ Obviously, with the gimmick it has, *SHRB* has an upbeat soundtrack to match, but it's no slouch in sound design with solid and meaty-sounding punches and kicks.

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



RAGUKA KIDS
NINTENDO 64

■ Another quirky and colourful fighting game with a graffiti-inspired aesthetic, though it is childish chalk drawings rather than spray-painted urban art in this one. It's also one of the N64's very few 2D games, let alone 2D fighting games. Amazingly, it somehow managed to get an EU release, too!



JET SET RADIO
DREAMCAST

■ Although it's not a fighting game, Sega's classic was obviously drawing from the same pool of inspiration as *Slap Happy Rhythm Busters*, in terms of its looks, its setting and its music. It's also a much-beloved classic to pretty much everyone who ever played it, too. Check out the cool sequel as well on Xbox.



DRAGLADE
NINTENDO DS

■ Although taking a more traditional anime influence for its aesthetic, *Draglade* does have a similar rhythm-based special moves gimmick with *Slap Happy Rhythm Busters*, with the extra addition of some RPG elements thrown into the mix. An interesting little effort that's worth tracking down.

Minority Report

FOX JUNCTION

■ DEVELOPER: TRIPS ■ YEAR: 1998

■ **WITH ITS DIVERSE range of robot-inhabited environments seemingly abandoned by mankind, all depicted with a great looking combination of sprites and low-poly 3D, it can't be denied that *Fox Junction* is an absolutely beautiful game to feast your eyes upon.** But, unfortunately, since it's such an obscure title, with only a tiny cult following drawn in by the game's looks and atmosphere, there's scant information on the internet, or anywhere else for that matter, about how its meant to be played.

All that's currently known is that you play as a young wanderer in this apparently empty world, travelling from place to place – and those places are beautiful and varied, from wind-swept deserts, to standing stone-littered plains, from glowing crystal caves to cosy villages with constellations marked out in the night skies above. Eventually, you'll notice that a tower in the distance is not just a background decoration, but has a fixed position, and can actually be reached.

This is as far as anyone has gotten, on the English-speaking internet, at least. Though a few people have managed to reach the tower without meeting their unseemly end at the hands of the various robots that litter the stages, none have managed to get inside it, or figure out the requirements for doing so, or even found out that entering said tower is the actual goal of the game or not.

If you're lucky enough to find a copy (though it doesn't tend to fetch high prices, *Fox Junction* doesn't turn up for sale often), and you want to play something that is utterly unique and mysterious, we would say that *Fox Junction* is definitely worth taking a chance on.



» [PlayStation] The 'Night Town', with its visible constellations in the sky, is a sight to behold.



» [PlayStation] Graphically, *Fox Junction* still holds up well, delivering some tasty looking environments to battle in.



» [PlayStation] *Fox Junction* is quite a hard game to get hold of, meaning you'll typically have to open your wallet.

MORE GAMES TO PLAY



» CYBER ORG

■ DEVELOPER: SQUARESOFT
■ YEAR: 1999

■ **Squaresoft did a** lot of branching out into genres it hadn't bothered with on the PlayStation, and *Cyber Org* is part of that experiment. It mixes elements of beat-'em-ups, action-RPGs and even roguelikes. You take a team of agents with varied abilities through a series of space stations. It was never going to set the world on fire, but *Cyber Org* is a nice little game, and it's a shame it never came to the west.



» SUPER ROBOT SHOOTING

■ DEVELOPER: MINATO GIKEN
■ YEAR: 1997

■ **There are a** few games on the PlayStation that seem like they existed to provide a substitute for games on Sega's consoles, like for *Gunstar Heroes* there's *Rapid Reload*, and for *Space Harrier* there's *Super Robot Shooting*. You pick from one of a few robots and blast through stages. Each stage is themed, and you can change robots between stages: good news for fans of thematic accuracy.



» EDGE OF SKYHIGH

■ DEVELOPER: MICRONET
■ YEAR: 1997

■ **It's clear that** *Edge Of Skyhigh* was a labour of love for its developers, and that love was aimed at *Afterburner II*. You fly a jet – which can be transformed into a giant robot – and you lock-on to flying enemies, just like *Afterburner*. But now, the sprite scaling of Sega's classic is replaced with texture mapped 3D, and there's more of a sci-fi theme to the proceedings, with stages having the player shoot down giant monsters.



» MAGICAL DROP F

■ DEVELOPER: SAS SAKATA
■ YEAR: 1999

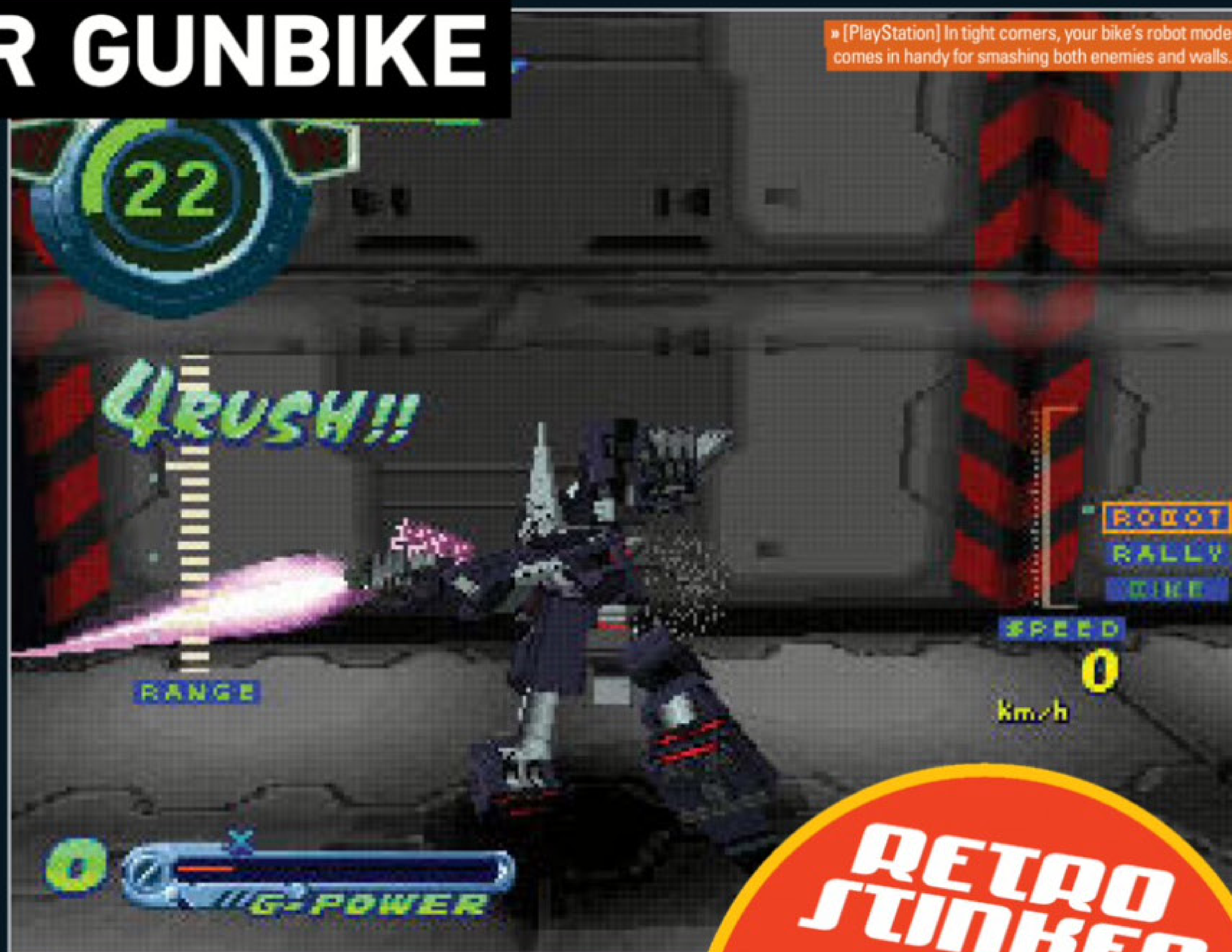
■ **Although it is** unheard of over here, *Magical Drop F* is the pinnacle of the puzzle series. It makes a few tweaks to the core game, like penalty orbs dropping in individual columns rather than solid rows, and though the changes seem small, they add up to a much better game. The graphics also see a improvement with more colours and animation, and there's the addition of a RPG mode, with equipment and *Magical Drop* battles.

SPEED POWER GUNBIKE

■ DEVELOPER: INTI CREATES ■ YEAR: 1998

■ **THIS GAME IS a bit of an odd one: on first examination, it's a striking title with a cool concept, but a clunky, awkward execution that's no fun to play.** Fortunately it's a game that rewards perseverance, as it gets more fun to play the more that you get used to its odd controls and mechanics. Also, it was made by Inti Creates, who are more associated with excellence in 2D platformers, like the *Mega Man Zero* series, or, more recently, *Azure Striker Gunvolt*.

The main focus of the game is riding at speed down long, futuristic and enemy-littered roads reminiscent of Eighties and Nineties cyberpunk anime, such as *Akira* or *Cyber City Oedo 808*. The vehicles you do this riding in/on are motorbikes that can transform at will into slower but easier to steer buggies, or very slow power armour that's much better suited to combat.



» [PlayStation] In tight corners, your bike's robot mode comes in handy for smashing both enemies and walls.


» [PlayStation] The transforming aspects of *Speed Power Gunbike*, ensures it stands apart from other racers.

When you first start playing, you'll bump into walls and other objects, running out of time by getting lost and generally having a bad time of it. If you make the effort to practice, though, *Speed Power Gunbike* feels great to play. It's almost like some kind of strange, less forgiving alternate universe *Sonic* game that wanted to make the player earn the feeling of speed and freedom.

RETRO STINKER

»CHAOS BREAK

■ DEVELOPER: EON ■ YEAR: 1992

■ **Loosely based on** the arcade game *Chaos Heat*, this replaces the pure action of that game with a poor man's *Resident Evil*, with lots of tedious corridor traipsing and even an unskippable sudoku puzzle.



» GERMS NERAWARETA MACHI

■ DEVELOPER: KEJ
■ YEAR: 1999

■ **With a large** 3D city to navigate, and plenty of buildings to explore and people to talk to, *Germs* is a game that was ahead of its time. Although it was released to no fanfare or acclaim back in 1999, it was rediscovered and gained a tiny cult following thanks to its aesthetic of low-poly buildings, faceless characters and sultry music.



» EXTRA BRIGHT

■ DEVELOPER: TO ONE
■ YEAR: 1996

■ **Upon first seeing** *Extra Bright*'s narrow, twisty tracks, you could easily mistake it for a futuristic racing game in the *F-Zero* vein, but it's actually a pretty slow paced on-rails shooter. It's a simple one, too, since you can't even move vertically, only side to side. *Extra Bright* looks great, though, all the models are nicely designed, looking both futuristic and cuddly at the same time, with rounded edges and pastel colours.



» KURUKURU MARUMARU

■ DEVELOPER: JAPAN ART MEDIA
■ YEAR: 2001

■ **Despite its silly** sounding name and colourful, cartoony graphics, *Kurukuru Marumaru* is actually a harsh driving game. It has a control system that uses every button on the PlayStation controller, having the player not only steering, controlling their speed and changing gears, but also starting the engine, using the hand brake and even turning on indicators before turning.



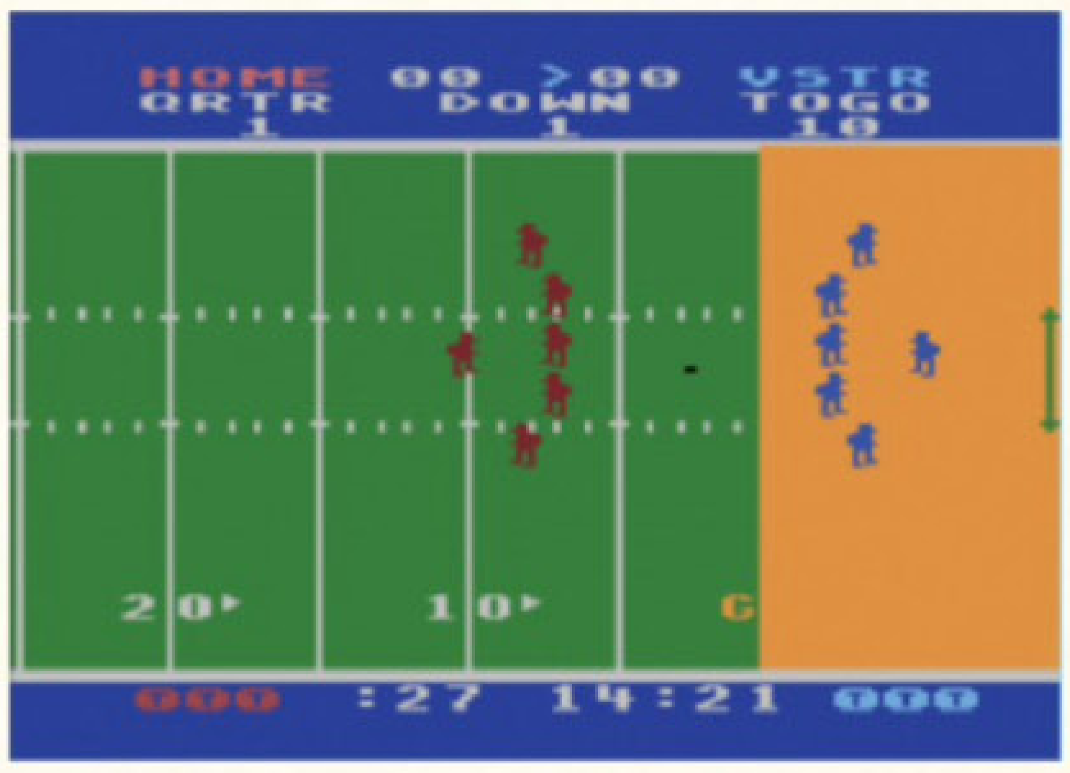
» PET IN TV

■ DEVELOPER: SCEI
■ YEAR: 1997

■ **Unlike most of** the games featured here, *Pet In TV* did get a release in Europe though without much fanfare. You guide a weird robot around, trying to teach it about the world. The ultimate goal is to build up its intellect so it can solve puzzles with no player input. It's an interesting concept, executed poorly. 'Guide' is an apt word, as you don't have direct control over your pet, as you can only make suggestions.

Long before industry veteran Scott Orr led the EA Sports juggernaut to world domination he formed a sports label of his own, the innovative Gamestar. Kieren Hawken stepped up to the plate to find out more about this pioneering software house





Gamestar was formed in 1982 by Scott Orr, the man who would later go on to design the *John Madden* games for Electronic Arts. The initial focus of the company was to create realistic sports games for the Commodore 64 and Atari 400/800 home micros, which at the time were the two leading computer platforms for gamers in North America. We arranged a sit down with Scott and we had to ask why he took the decision to focus on sports titles. "Our goal was to develop the best sports games on the market and support as many systems as our budgets and market demand allowed," he begins. "We focused on the Atari and Commodore computers because they were more arcade-action oriented but we also supported the early PC and Apple computers with a few titles once we got going." We would assume from the company's focus that sport was something that Scott was very passionate about. "I've been a big sports fan my entire life", Scott remarks, "so it seemed like a natural fit. Growing up I played and followed most major American sports, especially baseball and football. The San Francisco Giants and San Francisco 49ers were and still are my favourite sports teams." So did Scott see a gap in the market for more realistic sports games? "We wanted to make games that were realistic," he says, pretty much confirming our thoughts, before adding, "but given the limited technology our primary focus was more on the gameplay and the 'fun factor' rather than on the graphics. Gamestar was pretty much the first sports game developer to differentiate on-screen players with different ratings and skills, which gave our games more depth and realism over our competitors."

GAMESTAR





» Gamestar's John Cutter sits proudly at his PC as another hit game finds its way to the store shelves.

ARCADE PLUS Life before Gamestar

Interestingly, Gamestar was not Scott Orr's first videogame company, as that honour goes to the long forgotten Arcade Plus. "After receiving my BA and MBA degrees I returned to my home town of Santa Barbara, CA and started a game company called Arcade Plus," Scott explains. "We developed and published a clone of *Pac-Man* called *Ghost Hunter* for the Atari 8-bit home computers. It was incredibly successful but short-lived since Atari had rights to the official game and later demanded that we cease production." This lead Scott to fold Arcade Plus and move over the games he had in production over to Gamestar and change the focus from arcade game to sports titles. One that would prove very successful in hindsight with arcade clones becoming ten a penny and decent quality sports games being very much the opposite. *Night Rally*, due to be Arcade Plus's second game would be redesigned for Gamestar as *Baja Buggies* and became their first release.



The plan was in place, Gamestar would become the first software company to focus solely on sports titles and this love of sports and focus on realism would lead it to capture a portion of the market almost straight away. But a publisher is only as good as the developers who make the games for it, thankfully Scott had a great team that would, like him, go on to achieve big things in the industry. One such person was Ed Ringler, who would take up the role of senior producer at Gamestar but his introduction into the industry had more humble origins. "I was born in The Bronx and was a superstar athlete, or so my mum tells me," Ed quips. "I started working on the coin-op venders when I was in 7th grade and then stayed on with Musical Moments Inc. through college. At The Bronx High School Of Science, I programmed my first games on the school's tele-type computers using languages such as Fortran, Basic and Cobol. Following school, I stayed in New York and spent another five years in the coin-op business running my own routes and a circuit board repair shop (MetroVending Repair Service). Not long after this, I sold a game I designed and programmed in 6502 assembly language for the Atari 800 called *Money Run 2000* to a then tiny company, with not a flight simulator to their name, called Microprose Software. At the time, Bill Stealey was selling his big hit, *Floyd Of The Jungle*, out of a kitchen office! Through shopping my games around to publishers I wound up getting more videogame programming job offers than publishing offers, I remember being a little annoyed about that! So I decided to follow the words of a famous song and 'go West, young man' taking the offer that landed me in sunny So Cal with sports-only company called Gamestar. I still remember the slogan I saw when arriving there – 'We Bring Sports Alive!'"

Another man to arrive at Gamestar in the early days was programmer John Cutter. We decided to catch up with him about his route into the company. "I grew up in Wyoming and Colorado but matriculated in Southern California, majoring in communications at Pepperdine University," he remembers. "I was never very good at maths so, although I loved playing videogames, I never thought about learning how to actually program a computer until I was a college senior and bought ▶



> **"Our goal was to develop the best sports games on the market and support as many systems as our budgets and market demand allowed"**
> Scott Orr

IN THE KNOW

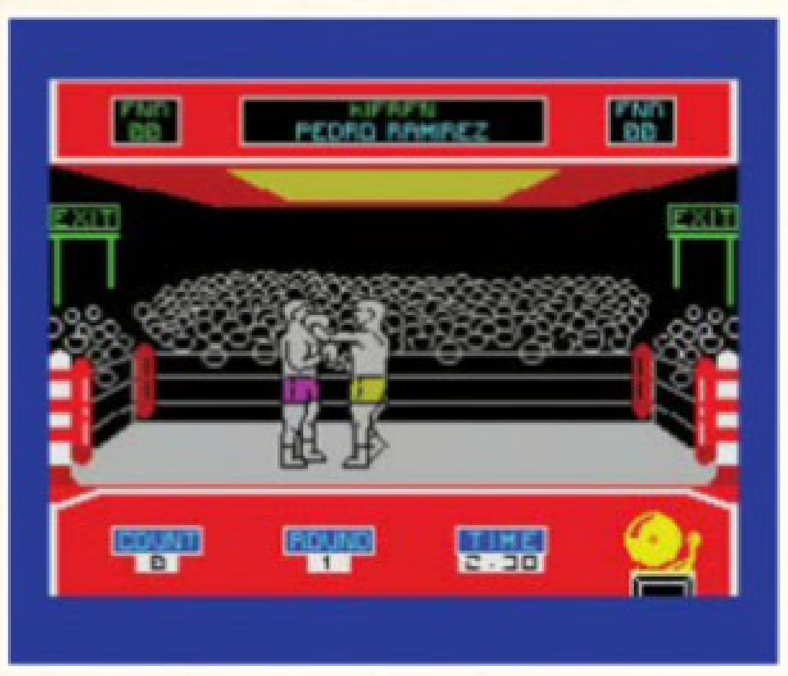
- Gamestar was not Scott's first software house, that honour goes to the short-lived Arcade Plus.
- Gamestar was originally formed after Atari threatened to sue Arcade Plus over its hugely successful *Pac-Man* clone, *Ghost Hunter*.
- Founder Scott Orr was a huge sports fan himself and saw a gap in the market for quality games of this type.
- Gamestar were one of the first companies to license real life sports stars such as Barry McGuigan and Pete Rose.
- Gamestar produced games for over ten formats, including relatively obscure systems such as the Thomson MO and Apple IIGS.
- The huge early success of the company lead to it being purchased by Activision with Scott Orr being kept at the helm.
- Gamestar became well-known for its '*Championship* series of games, each focusing on a different sport.
- Activision later released sequels to several of the most popular Gamestar titles under its own name.



» [Apple II] The original *Star Rank Boxing* was renamed using Barry McGuigan's star power, the sequel was more of the same with less of the fame.

TIMELINE

- **1981** The origins of Gamestar started with the short-lived Arcade Plus label.
- **1982** Gamestar was founded by Scott Orr to make realistic sports games for the Commodore 64 and Atari 8-bit computers.
- **1983** Gamestar sign an important distribution deal with leading US software company Activision.
- **1984** This year sees the start of the *On* series with *On-Court Tennis* and *On-Field Football*.
- **1985** Gamestar begins the licensing of famous sports stars with Northern Irish boxer Barry McGuigan.
- **1986** The *Championship* series of games begins with *Championship Baseball* for the Atari 8-bit and Commodore 64.
  Gamestar becomes part of Activision after it saw the huge success and potential of the label.
- **1987** This year sees the company produce its very last game for the Apple II, drag racing simulator *Top Fuel Eliminator*.
- **1988** Gamestar adds baseball hall of famer Pete Rose to its list of officially licensed sports stars.
- **1989** The last games are released under the Gamestar label, ice hockey extravaganza *Face Off!* and excellent PC racer *Motocross*.
- **1990** Gamestar folds and is officially merged into Activision with all further games bearing the Activision name.



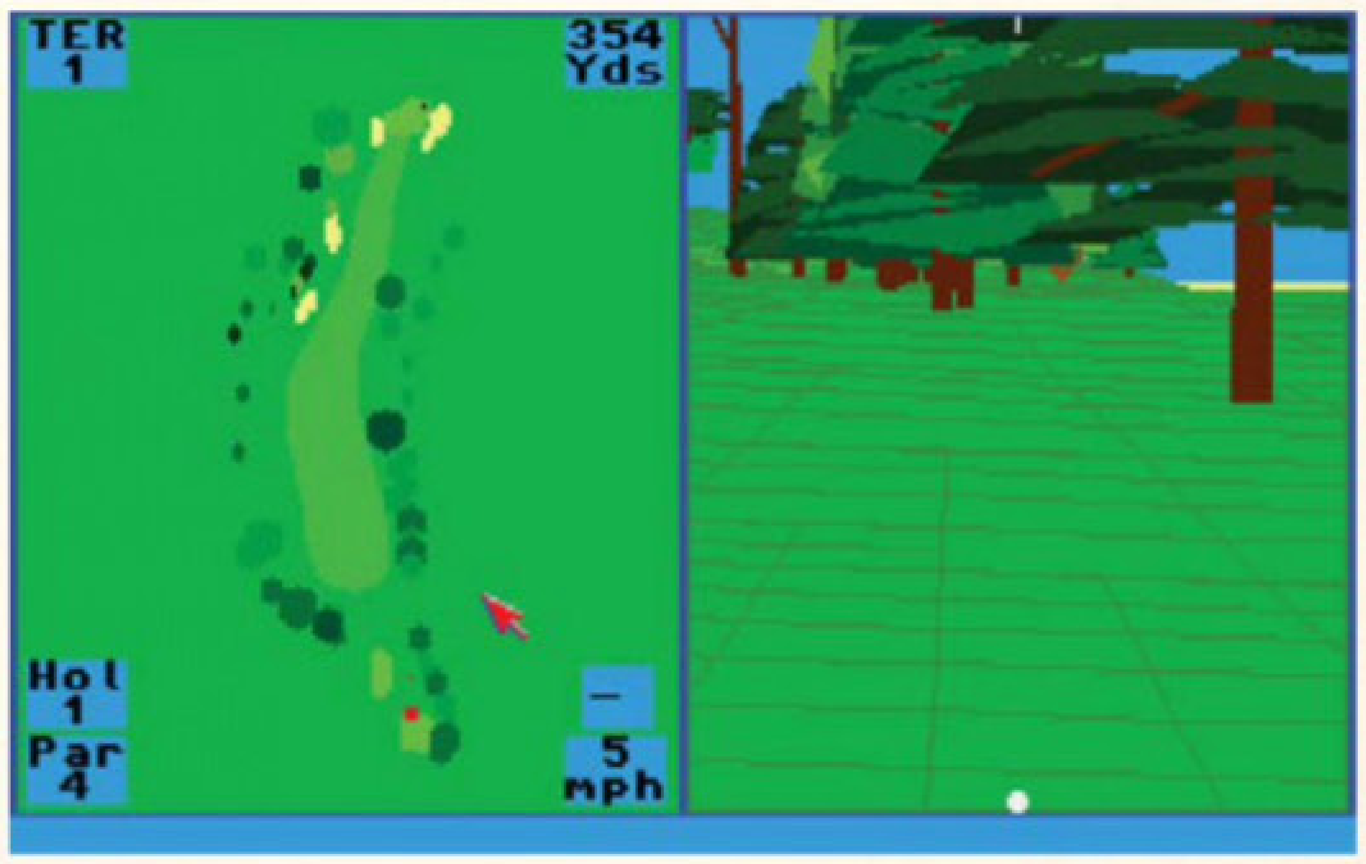
» [ZX Spectrum] *Barry McGuigan's Boxing* was highly praised by the press and shot straight to the top of the charts, the Speccy version was especially good fun.

"We had to destroy those 10,000 disks, which was an expensive blunder on my part. Surprised I didn't get fired over that one!" John Cutter

▶ a Timex Sinclair 1000 (ZX81). I discovered that programming is more about logic and problem solving than maths, depending on what you are trying to do, of course! And I quickly fell in love with it. After graduating I upgraded to a C64 and taught myself machine language programming, while simultaneously working the midnight-to-six shift at a local radio station. I'd get home every morning at about half-six in the morning, have breakfast with my wife, and then she would send me off to bed. I was too excited to sleep, so I'd spend all day playing games and teaching myself to program then I'd hurriedly shuffle off to bed in the middle of the afternoon. My wife would come home at half-five in the evening thinking I had been in bed all day, would wake me up so we could have dinner together, then I'd drive myself to work at 11PM, exhausted. It didn't help that I was the DJ at a light rock station as the music only made me even more tired! When the radio station cut back my hours I quit to focus on game development full-time. Gamestar was one of the few game companies in the area at that time, so I called them and asked for a tour. While I was there I learned that they needed a special graphics editor to create scrolling screens. I told Scott Orr that I could create a tool like that for them and he said they would publish it and pay me a royalty. For the next three or four months I accompanied my wife to work and spent all day in the library, writing out the editor code in a thick notebook. When I was finally finished I typed it all into an assembler and it didn't work. In fact, it didn't even come close to working! The base was pretty solid, though, and after a week or so I got it debugged and drove it out to Gamestar to show the team what I had done. After the second or third trip, Scott informed me that they didn't want their competitors to have the editor, so they decided that they were not going to publish it. I was disappointed until he offered me a programming job for $27,500 a year, which felt like an absolute fortune at the time!"

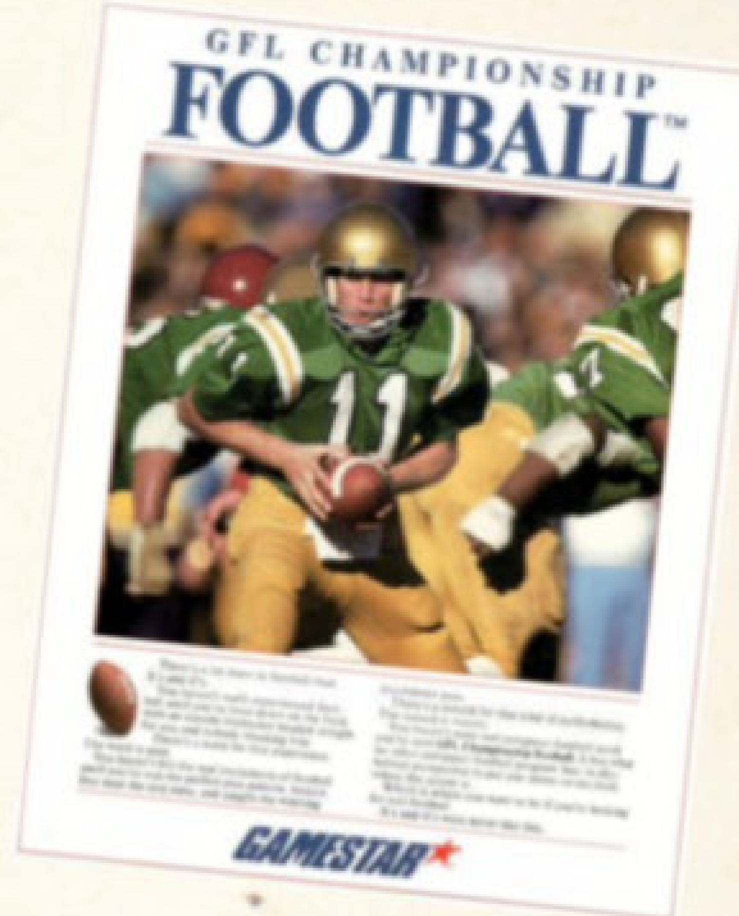
With a great team in place it was time for Gamestar to get some great games out of the door. "*Baja Buggies* on the Atari 400/800 was actually the first game developed and published by Gamestar and was a big success," enthuses Scott. "Dan Ugrin was the programmer and developed a cool independently scrolling background that really enhanced the pseudo-

» [Amiga] One of the better golf games on the Amiga, *Championship Golf*, also used the same unique split-screen viewpoint as other games in the series.

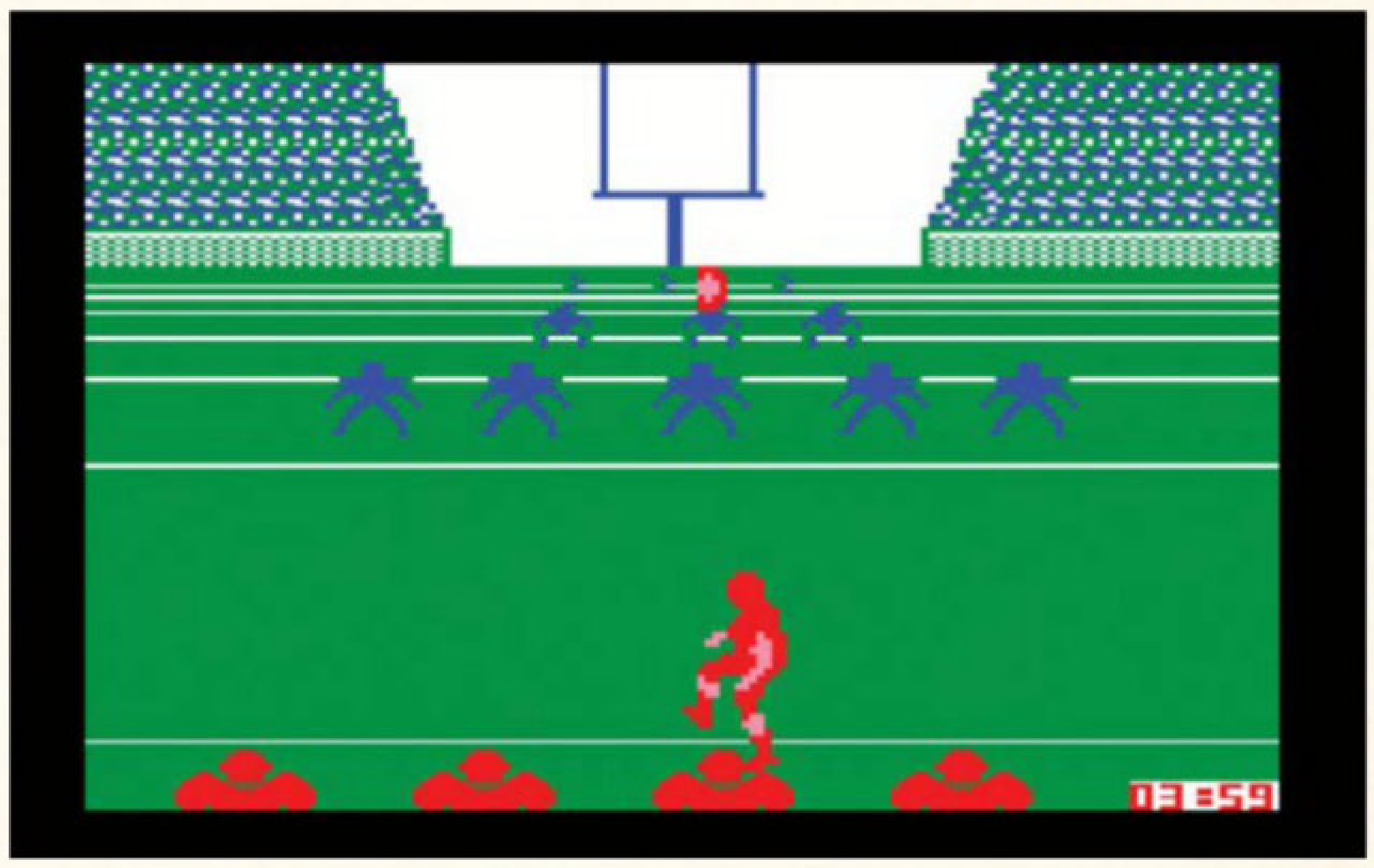


3D look. In fact, *Baja Buggies* was the first computer racing game to feature that kind of visual effect and may have even predated *Pole Position* in the arcades." John also recalls being put straight to work shortly after signing up. "I sort of had two mentors in those early days to help get me started. There was Dan Ugrin, the VP, and my office mate, 'Fast Eddy' Ringler as we called him that because he was kind of a player! Ed was a talented programmer and I think he had just completed *On Court Tennis* when I joined the company. He was about half finished with *On Track Racing* and my first task was to help him finish the game. I don't remember exactly why it happened, but he left Gamestar before the title was finished, leaving me to wrap up the coding. I also played A *lot* of *On Field Football* with Scott and his brother, Keith, but I didn't really work on that one sadly." Going back to Scott's comments about *Baja Buggies* we had to ask him if getting the most out of the hardware was something important to him and his team. "Yes, we felt pushing the hardware was very important to the game experience," he muses, "but never at the expense of playability and the fun factor. Some of our rivals emphasised graphics over playability, which we felt actually gave us a advantage, since head-to-head competition is the very essence of sports gaming.

Things were moving fast at Gamestar, the *On* series had been a big success and now they were looking to push on. Scott hired more programmers and artists and challenged them to come up with more new ideas. "I remember Doug Barnett showing up from somewhere in the Midwest one day, wanting to pitch a couple of game ideas," recalls John. "I was excited to meet him until he arrived at the office sporting a big cowboy hat and a long curly moustache! But my initial impression was wrong because Doug turned out to be a very talented artist and designer and we did his game *Star Rank Boxing*. I worked with Doug on that as a producer, and pitched in a bit on the design too. I also co-designed *GBA Basketball* with Scott, and sort of worked as a producer on that title as well." The ability to spot talent and move them up the ranks was proving to be a useful skill for Scott. "I guess I have a talent in finding and mentoring people with great potential," remarked Scott very humbly. "Success in the games business is a team effort so surrounding yourself with smart and talented people is a win-win strategy, even at the expense of your ego. Their subsequent success is a source of great pride, knowing that I gave them an opportunity and help to realise their potential." John is also very candid in his assumptions of talent, believing that maybe he was moved up for other reasons. "I've always been very creative, but, frankly, I'm just not smart enough to be a great



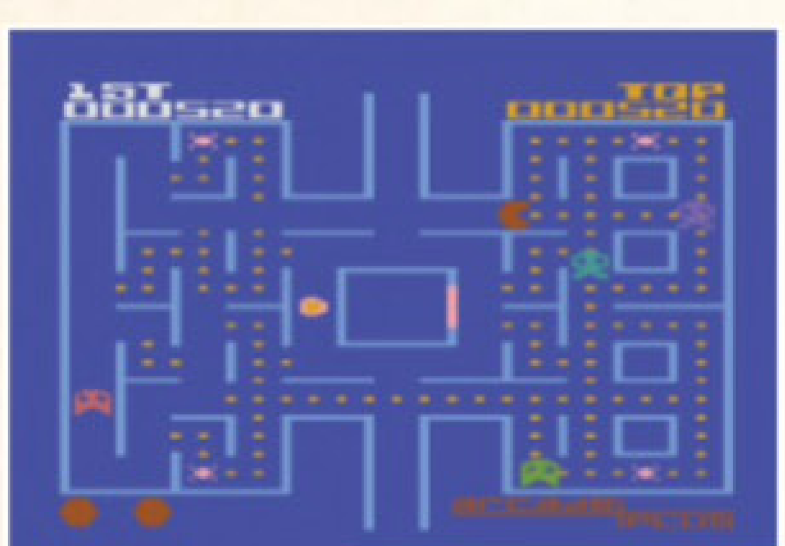
» [Amstrad CPC] Despite being very much an American software house Gamestar's titles also appeared on several European home micros, Amstrad CPC included.



DEFINING GAMES

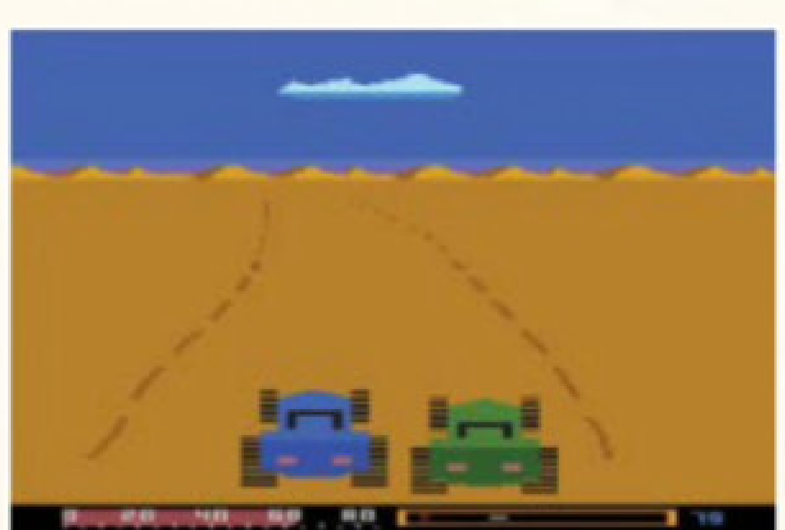
Ghost Hunter 1981

Though technically not a Gamestar title, *Ghost Hunter* was published on the Arcade Plus label (see box out) and is definitely a game that is worth mentioning as it provides one of the best games of *Pac-Man that* you will find on an early 8-bit computer. Unlike many similar attempts before it, this not a straight clone of everyone's favourite dot-muncher as there are several differences in the way the levels are designed, most notably the vertical exits, non-symmetrical mazes and the way the ghosts behave.



Baja Buggies 1984

Originally coded for the Atari 8-bit computers, it's the graphics that particularly stand out. The huge sprites and winding roads move at speed with programmer Dan Ugrin utilising a number of tricks to bring an arcade quality racing experience into the home. The game was also unique for the time in that hitting other cars didn't cause you to crash, it merely slowed you down, something that would later become the standard in racing games. *Electronic Fun* scored it three out of four, praising the "fast 3D-style visuals".



Barry McGuigan Championship Boxings 1985

Originally known as Star Rank Boxing in North America, this would be one of the first home computer games to license a professional sportsman, in this case former WBA World Featherweight Champion, Barry McGuigan. The game was released to widespread acclaim with Sinclair User claiming it was "the best boxing game on the market", while Your Sinclair summarised it as "a top-ten contender in the software boxing championships".



GFL Championship Football 1988

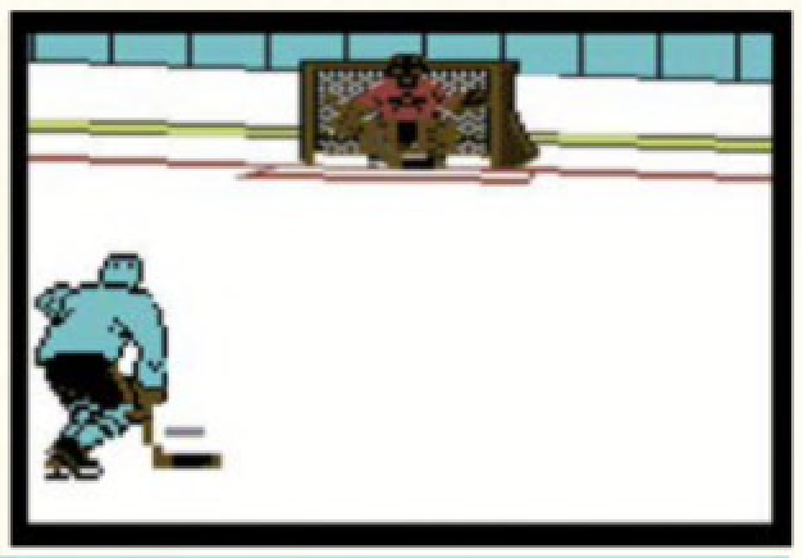
Another title that was highly acclaimed by the press on release was Gamestar's *GFL Championship Football*. It was unique in that it featured a first-person perspective. The Atari ST version was especially well-received thanks to its realistic 16-bit graphics. Designed by Scott Orr, the game is fondly remembered and featured several ideas that would be implemented in Scott's *Madden* series. With 28 teams and numerous options it was also far more complex than many of the similar games on the market.





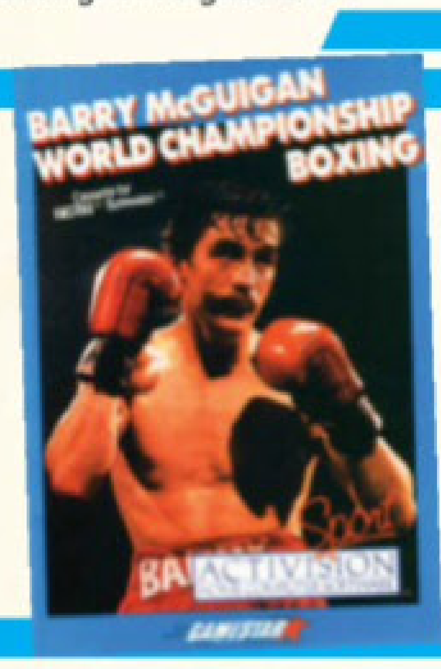
THE DNA OF GAMESTAR

Realism



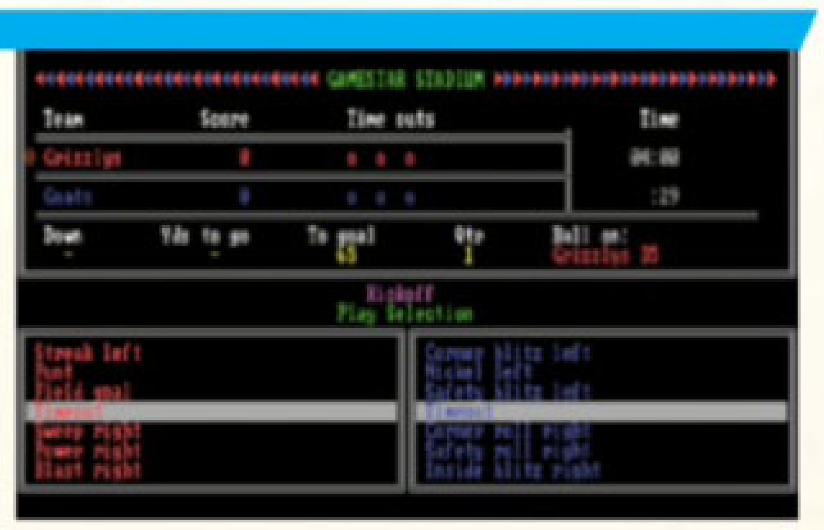
The programmers at Gamestar prided themselves in making their games more realistic than the competition but not at the expense of the overall fun factor. As a big sports fan himself, Scott Orr wanted to replicate his favourite hobbies as closely as possible and spent ages watching different contests to get them made just right in digital form.

Superstars



Scott was quick to realise that there was lots of value in attaching famous sports stars to Gamestar's releases. Gamestar worked with some of the top stars in their respective sports such as former boxing world champion Barry McGuigan, baseball hall of famer Pete Rose and Canadian NHL Hockey favourite, Gordie Howe.

Stat Attack



Early sports games were quite archaic, simply trying to replicate the basics of each activity. The arrival of more advanced computers allowed games designers to add statistics for players and teams, league structures, formations, tactics and many other features that made the games closer to their real life counterparts.

Talent



Among the ranks at Gamestar were some talented people. Scott went on to develop the *Madden* series and head up EA Sports. While Ed Ringler formed his own company, Ringler Studios, developing titles such as *Clayfighter, Brett Hull Hockey, Barkley: Shut Up & Jam* and *Batman: Return Of The Joker.*

Trend Setters

As the first company to focus on sports games Gamestar set a trend that would later be picked up by other companies, something Scott predicted. Realising the value of sports games it wasn't long before people such Accolade, EA, Sega and Sony set up their own labels to focus on this genre with enormous success.





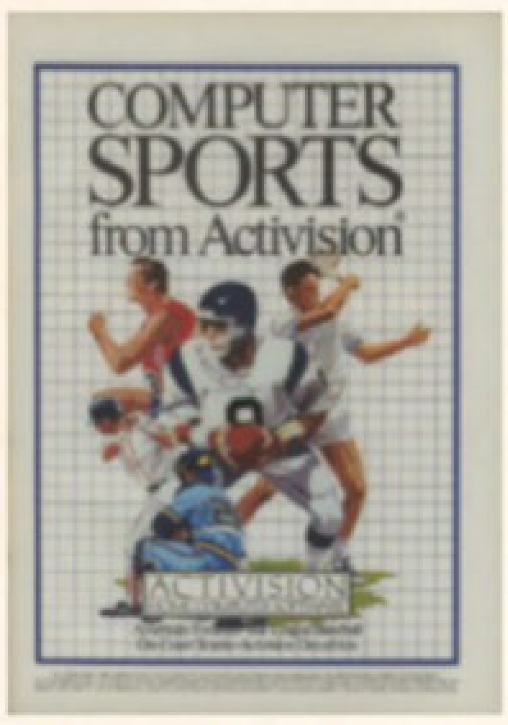
programmer. I came to realise this when I could hear Dan Ugrin, literally a rocket scientist before he joined the company, in the next office trying to learn 16-bit assembly on his brand new Macintosh computer. He was super smart and very mild mannered, so it was a shock to hear him, at least once a day, suddenly scream out a bunch of obscenities while throwing something heavy against the adjoining wall. I figured if Dan was having that much trouble programming a next gen system I would never be able to do it! I worked my ass off to learn how to program the C64 but my first job assignment was to port one of our games from the Commodore to the Atari 400/800. It was like starting all over again and between that and Dan's outbursts I realized that I would never make it as a programmer. After talking to Scott I transitioned into a full-time producer/designer role and that's what I've been doing ever since. Though I try to focus solely on game design these days!"

Gamestar's prolific success meant it was soon bought out by its distributors Activision, so we took the opportunity to find out more on this period of change for the company. "The distribution deal with Activision had its ups and downs and we lost control over our destiny, since they controlled our sales and cash flow," explains Scott. "It became clear after the first year that we needed to either become fully integrated with Activision or move on. We ended up selling out to them with a lot of expectations that never materialised sadly. When Activision originally approached us about a distribution deal we were interested but cautious. Their head of sales, however, was a very impressive guy who



» [PC] Baseball games have always been popular stateside and GameStar created several.

"I sold a game I designed and programmed in 6502 assembly language for the Atari 800 called Money Run 2000 to a then tiny company, with not a flight simulator to their name, called Microprose Software" Ed Ringler



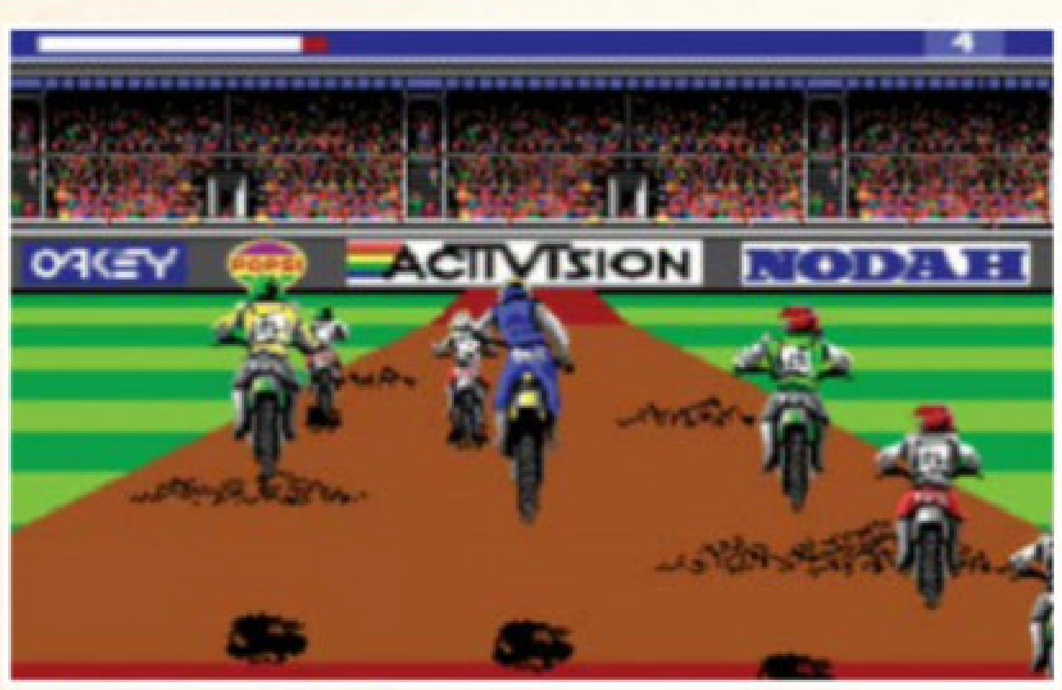
» This is a rare Activision branded advert for Gamestar's best selling range of sports titles.

persuaded us that the distribution deal was a great opportunity that would let us remain independent and grow much faster. Unfortunately he left Activision soon after we inked the deal and, not surprisingly, things got off to a rocky start and never really recovered. I was fortunate to be able to later work with that guy during my ten years with EA. His name is Larry Probst, the former CEO and Chairman of EA and now president of the US Olympic Committee, who led the company to become *the* publisher in the game industry during his tenure." How did the Activision deal change things at Gamestar, though? "The bigger budgets and better marketing did result in more products and higher sales but Activision went through a lot of management and operational changes after our acquisition, including replacing the CEO and closing our operation in Santa Barbara, so things definitely didn't work out as planned. The lessons learned did benefit us in future endeavours so the experience served a valuable purpose." John remembers this period of change, too, for even worse reasons. "It was probably a good thing for the company, but a bad thing for me personally, as I was let go. I remember that Activision sent out a bunch of guys in suits to interview everyone at the office and that is the only time in my career that I've ever been asked: 'If you were a tree what kind of tree would you be, and why?' The interview didn't go well and I was dismissed a week or so later."



We couldn't leave without asking the guys if they had any good stories, and John had some absolute belters, enough to fill a whole article on their own. "I had some great times riding around with Ed Ringler in his convertible, top down, wind blowing through my hair," he remembers, before adding the following. "I don't remember how or why, but someone in the office had a pirated copy of some obscure tool on their computer. This tool made its way into our development folder and, since I never used it, I just forgot about it. So after months of hard work I finally finished my first commercial game, *On Track Racing*, and after a bunch of testing we sent it out to the disk duplicators to make 10,000 copies. We got the first set of disks back and I excitedly fired up the game on my C64 using the standard game launch command. I bet you can guess what the first program on the disk was. Yep, the pirated tool! I looked on in horror as, instead of our game, the tool logo screen appeared, with a big stamp over it: "CRACKED BY HAXXORZ HITMEN". I was mortified. We caught the error before the game got shipped but we had to destroy those 10,000 disks, which was an expensive blunder on my part. Surprised I didn't get fired over that one!"

It's only right that we finish this article with a few words from Scott about what made Gamestar so great and the legacy it left. "When we started Gamestar the wisdom was that gamers were geeks and not very interested in sports. We knew better and the success of our games as well as sports games from other publishers proved that notion wrong. Sports gaming became one of the biggest parts of the industry." ✱



» [PC] *Motocross* was one of the last games to be released under the Gamestar label and was a very impressive take on the high-octane sport.

Special thanks to Scott Orr, John Cutter and Ed Ringler for sharing their memories with us.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

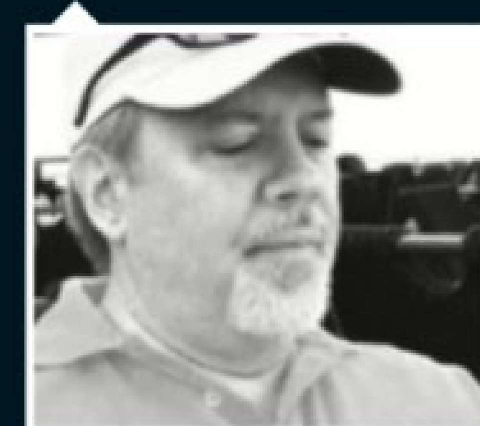


Scott Orr

The Activision takeover saw Scott take up a senior role with the company before a short stint consulting for other publishers. This led him to working on the resurrection of the *Madden* franchise. After more success with games such as the *NHL Hockey* series, he moved into a role as vice president. In 2001 Scott left EA to start working on mobile games, firstly with his own company Sorrent – an abbreviation of Scott Orr Entertainment. Then in 2004 Scott was ejected from Sorrent by the board and founded Bigdog Games to develop next-gen console and handheld games.

John Cutter

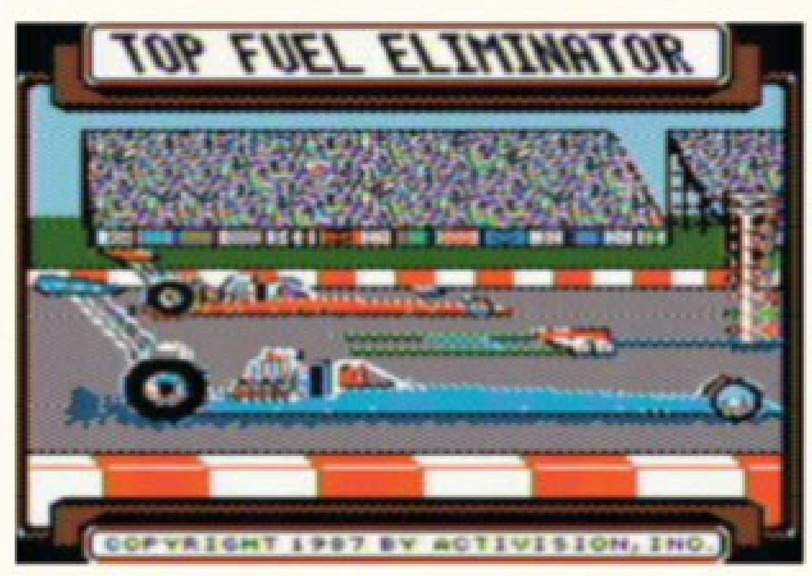
John's next job after leaving Gamestar was with the legendary Cinemaware Corporation. Whilst working there, he designed and/or produced *Defender Of The Crown*, *Rocket Ranger*, *Wings*, *TV Sports Football* and many other successful games. After that stint, he joined New World Computing to help create some of the *Might And Magic* games before moving over to Dynamix where he designed and produced *Betrayal At Krondor*. The last big game that John worked on was *Fairway Solitaire* for Big Fish Games in Seattle.

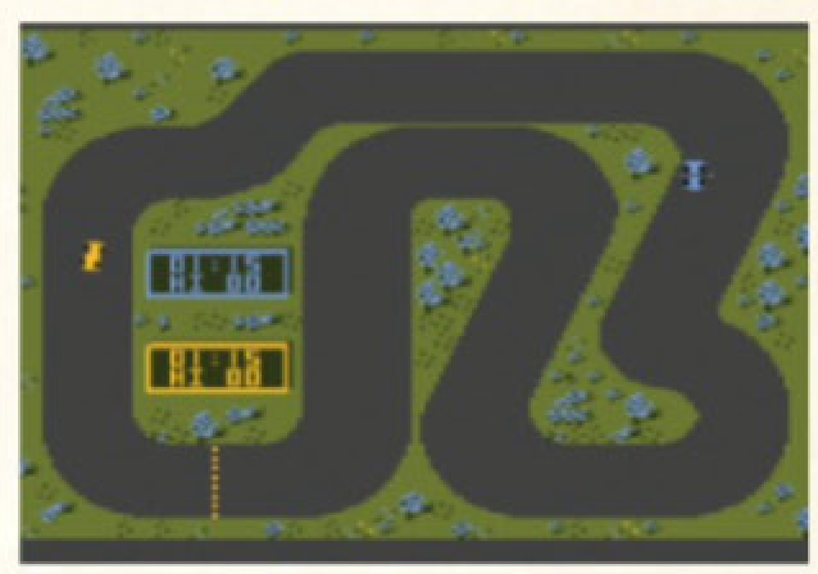




Ed Ringler

After his departure from Gamestar, Ed went on to become CEO and president of DesignStar Consultants, once again specialising in sports games, before forming his own company Alpine Software in 1990 working on titles such as *Mario Lemieux Hockey* for the Sega Mega Drive and Atari Lynx. A short stint as VP at Microleague Multimedia followed before he once again headed his own company up – the prolific Ringler Studios. After this Ed left the games industry and worked in a number of different fields including finance, web design and even custom-built furniture.





» (Above left) [Apple II] The last Apple II game released by Gamestar, *Top Fuel* was a realistic drag racing simulator.

» (Above) [Atari 8-bit] *On-Track Racing* by Ed Ringler and John Cutter might look like a *Super Sprint* clone but it actually pre-dates Atari's game by over a year.

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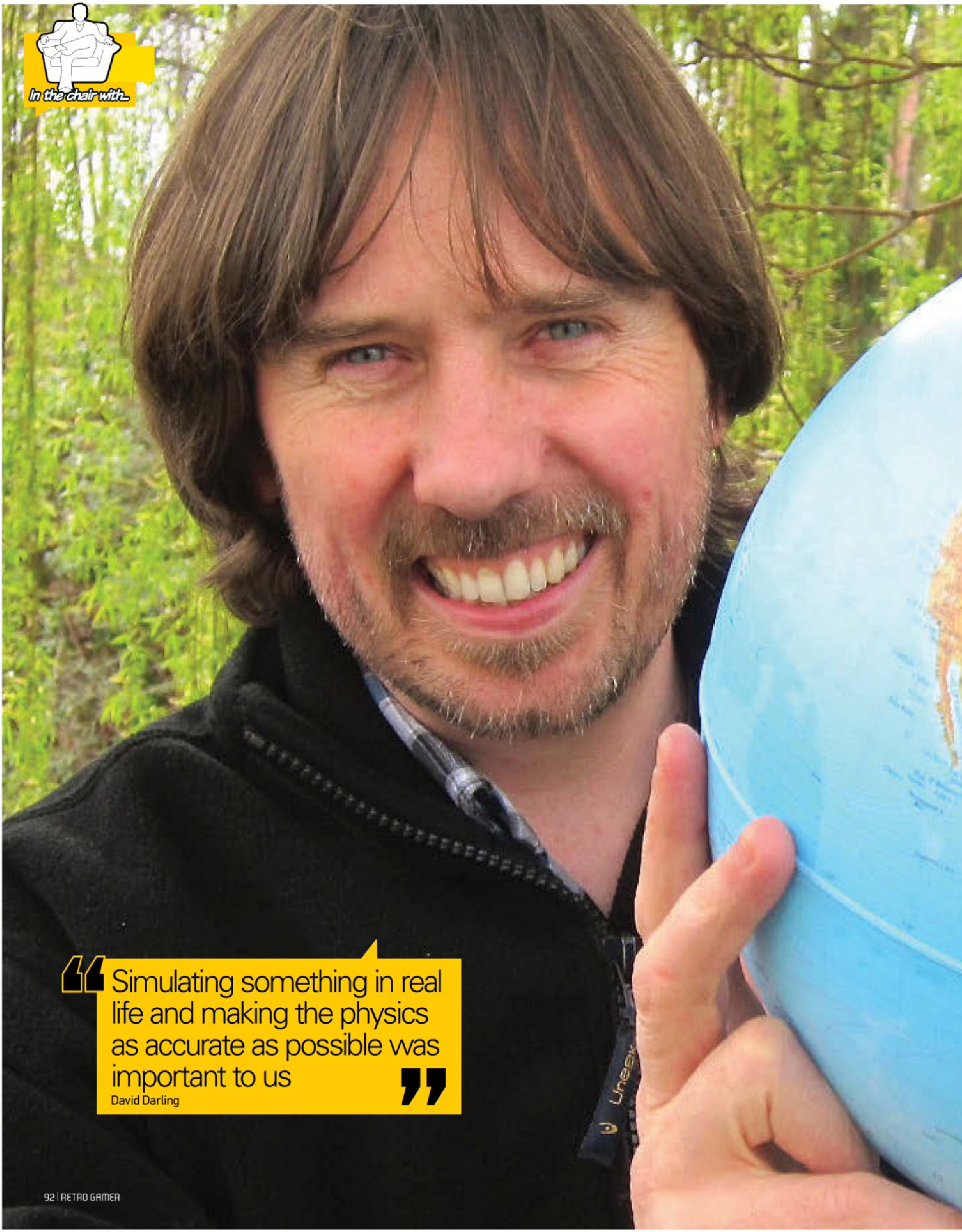
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> Simulating something in real life and making the physics as accurate as possible was important to us
>
> David Darling



In the chair with...

DAVID DARLING

David Darling has been involved in gaming since 1981 and he most notably co-founded and ran Codemasters for 26 years. Here he talks to David Crookes about his career to date and why he wishes he could be around 100 years from now

His family may have sold its stake in Codemasters in 2007 but David could not stay away from games for too long. Having set up a new developer, Kwalee, to produce games for mobile phones, the entrepreneur has come full circle, effectively being just as hands-on today as when he began Galactic Software in 1981. Over the years, he has seen many changes in the industry and he has worked with well-known brands including a long-running series of simulators, *Dizzy, Micro Machines, Colin McRae Rally, TOCA* and *Brian Lara Cricket*.

You were there at the start of the industry but when did you become interested in computers?
At a very early age. When I was younger, my granddad had worked as an electronics designer for a colour television company in Australia and he had taught himself to build transistor radios. He was making electronic circuit boards with resistors, transistors and capacitors and he got us hooked too. But when my dad got a Commodore PET, it was like a new frontier. We saw that you didn't have to work with electronics to get computers to work. Rather than a soldering iron, you only needed a keyboard and some coding knowledge.

Did you start to program games?
Not immediately. My dad designed contact lenses for a living and he wanted to use the PET to design the curvature of the lenses and for computing equations. By that time my brother Richard and I had been programming a computer at school using punched cards. So when the engineers at my dad's company were unsure how to program the PET, he asked me and my brother to help and we said we would as long as we could borrow the computer at the weekends. We wrote a *D&D* game on it.

What was that game like?
It was just a text game and it just had these text descriptions: 'You're around the camp fire and a troll is coming up behind you. What do you do?' It would give the options: go north, go east, fight the troll or whatever. It was just for fun, for us. We were in the *D&D* club at school and we enjoyed it.

So was that game responsible in kickstarting a hobby in games programming?
Well, we had a friend called Michael Hiebert when we were living in Canada and he'd heard that Commodore was launching a new machine called the VIC-20. Around 90 per cent of Canadians live within ten miles of the American border, and things are often available in America before Canada, so his family drove over the border to get this computer. We started using the VIC-20 to make games, making versions title such as of *Galaxian*, *Defender* and *Pac-Man*.

Is this around the time when you set up Galactic Software?
We did that in maybe 1981. Me and Richard had gone to live with my grandparents in Somerset and the rest of the family lived in Vancouver. We got a VIC-20 of our own but we kept in touch with Michael. We'd send cassette tapes to him, some of them with audio recordings telling him what we were up to and showing him the games we were working on. He would do the same. We thought it would be a good idea to sell our games and we spent some pocket money we had saved on ▶





David and Richard Darling were dubbed 'whiz kids' and David says they enjoyed the press attention their game making brought.

an advert in *Popular Computing Weekly*. It was a half-page advert and we called it 'Local Vic-20 Games From America', or something like that, because some of the games were being made in Canada. We got loads of people wanting the games so we'd stay up all night duplicating them and sending them out. In the end, there were too many to duplicate by hand so we found a music company that could do it for us. I had a Yamaha FS1-E moped so I jumped on that with the masters and come back with full boxes.

Where was the inspiration for your games coming from? What drove you?
We had always liked things that were state of the art but we always wanted to improve on it; we always wanted to move with innovation and inventiveness. For me, the games industry has evolved a bit like the other arts. And just as Caravaggio, the Italian artist, pioneered new techniques and the artists learned from each other, so we were learning from everything that was around us. We made versions of *Pac-Man* and so did the Stamper brothers. It's how we learned.

Your early games caught the attention of Mastertronic, didn't they?
Our dad came back from Canada and he joined our company. He also had a friend who worked at Currys and he had some retail contacts so we started selling our games to Woolworths and WHSmith. We carried on advertising to promote those games. Mastertronic was getting ready to launch a games division and it saw our adverts. We were asked if we would like to program some games for them and we did. But Mastertronic didn't know much about games because it was from the videotape industry. They asked if we knew any more programmers and whether we could find any to make more games so we set up Artificial Intelligence as a development company. We owned half and they owned half.

Had you left school by this point?
I left school when I was 16. I was interested in going to college but they weren't teaching computer games or games programming or anything like that. If you wanted to program it was all business but I wasn't interested. My brother left at 15 and we just wanted to get into the business of creating and selling games. Richard was always programming and I was half and half. My dad was all business. My dad wanted us to go to college and university and train to be opticians but we convinced him that this was more exciting. I think he felt gaming would be like hula hoops – you know, some kind of fad – but we convinced him that it would be around forever.

Would you have become an optician?
I don't think so. It never interested me.

So you set up Codemasters?
We did. Launching Codemasters was really fun. We had also been working with Mirrorsoft in the early Eighties but just like at Mastertronic, we couldn't do what we wanted to do and the games we wanted to do. When we ran Galactic Software we had our own publishing company and we liked that. It was good when we spent a year doing the first games at Codemasters. We launched the company with 12 games. It was September 1986.

Why did you call it Codemasters?
Me and Richard were programmers to begin with. So it was us being the masters of the code.

Did you get a lot of people pestering for jobs?
For the first few years Codemasters was more like a publishing house and we were working with others

David's first home computer was the Commodore PET.



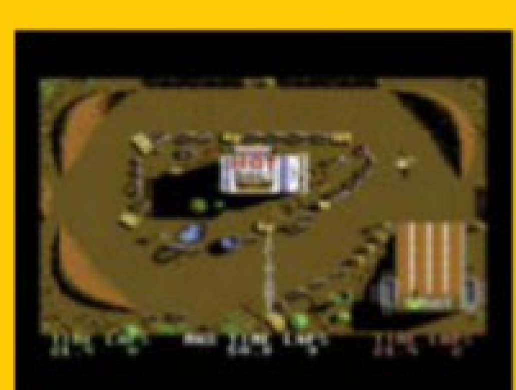
FIVE TO PLAY

David's been involved in some fantastic games



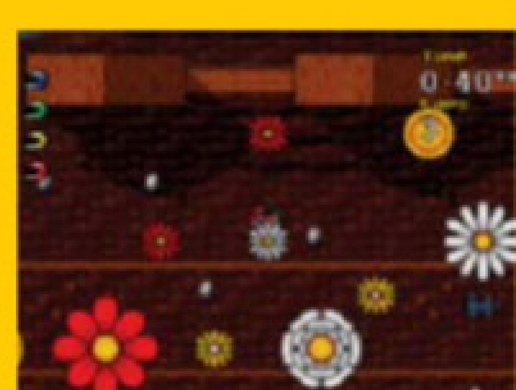
THE LAST V8 1986

■ David programmed this game based on his brother's design, splitting the screen in two with a top-down racer across the top and an instrument panel on the bottom. While this squeezed the action, the game ran in native mode on the C128 and it was the first game to be released under Mastertronic's M.A.D. Label.



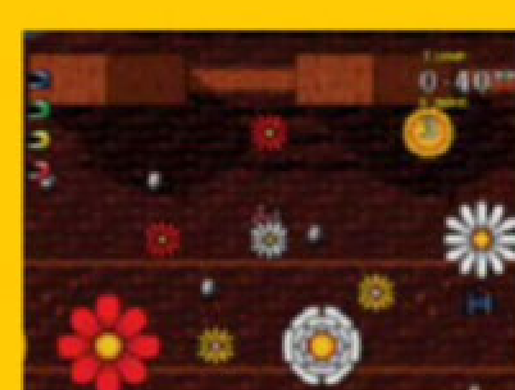
BMX SIMULATOR 1986

■ The word 'simulator' was a bit of red herring since this game was more of an overhead arcade game rather than a faithful recreation of the popular pastime. But it heralded the start of the series of *Simulator* titles for which the Darlings and Codemasters would become famous.



DIZZY 1987

■ The Oliver twins were one of Codemasters' most successful teams and it was with *Dizzy* that they made their mark. David and Richard Darling had already agreed to take on *Super Robin Hood* when it decided to publish *Dizzy*, and after a slow start, and a sequel, the character went on to become a mascot for Codemasters.



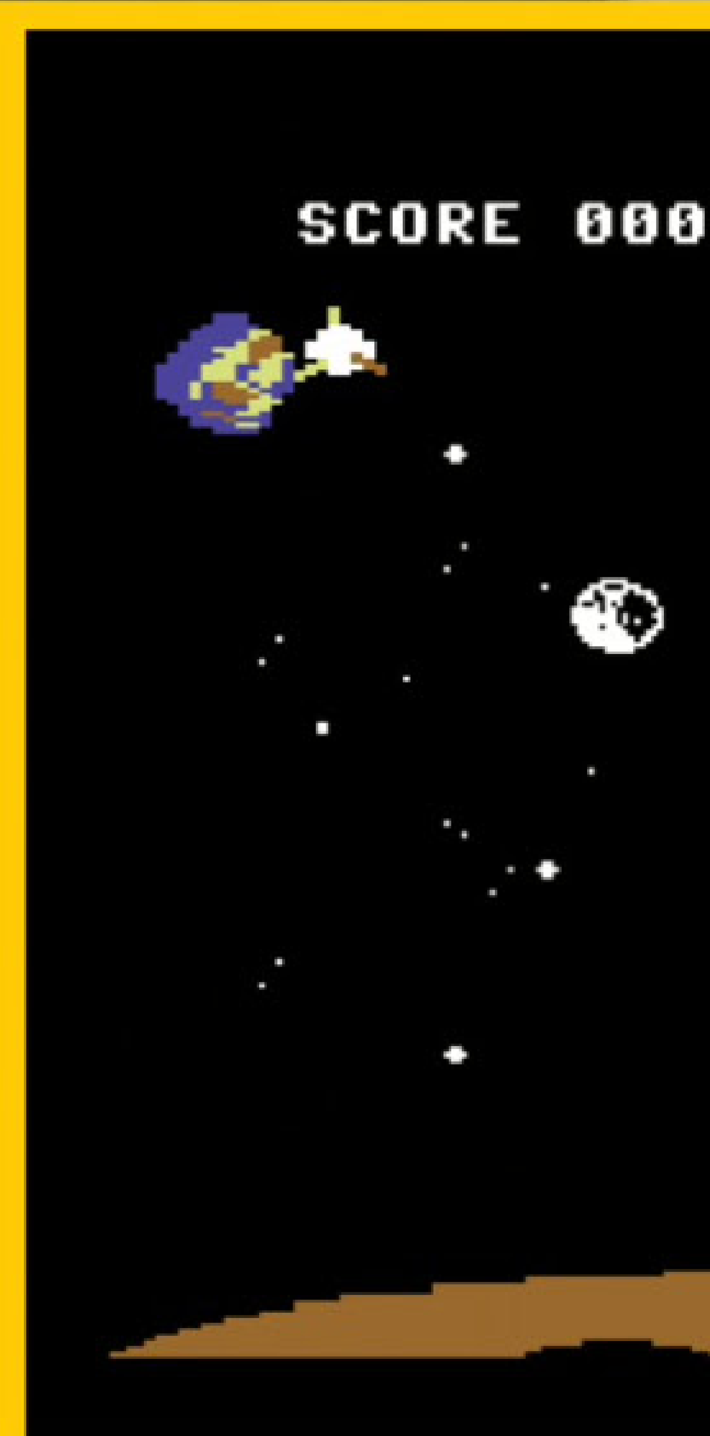
MICRO MACHINES 1991

■ *Micro Machines* was more than just a game: it was a two-fingered salute to Nintendo by Codemasters. No, *Micro Machines* did not come with the official Nintendo Seal of Quality but this absolutely stellar multiplayer racer across familiar household objects was a winner regardless.



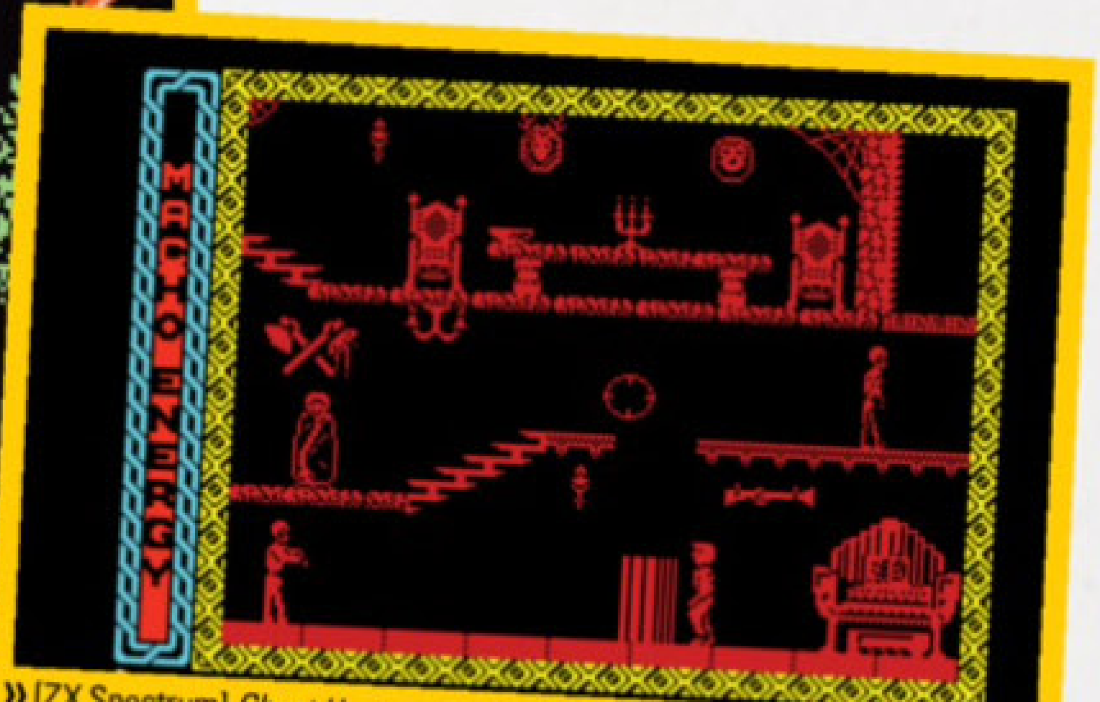
COLIN MCRAE RALLY 1998

■ David says Sony supported Codemasters well and one of the fruits of that relationship was *Colin McRae Rally*, a realistic rally sim released in 1998 – and a game that almost paid homage to the company's simulator heritage. It featured real cars and drivers and it was praised for its physics.

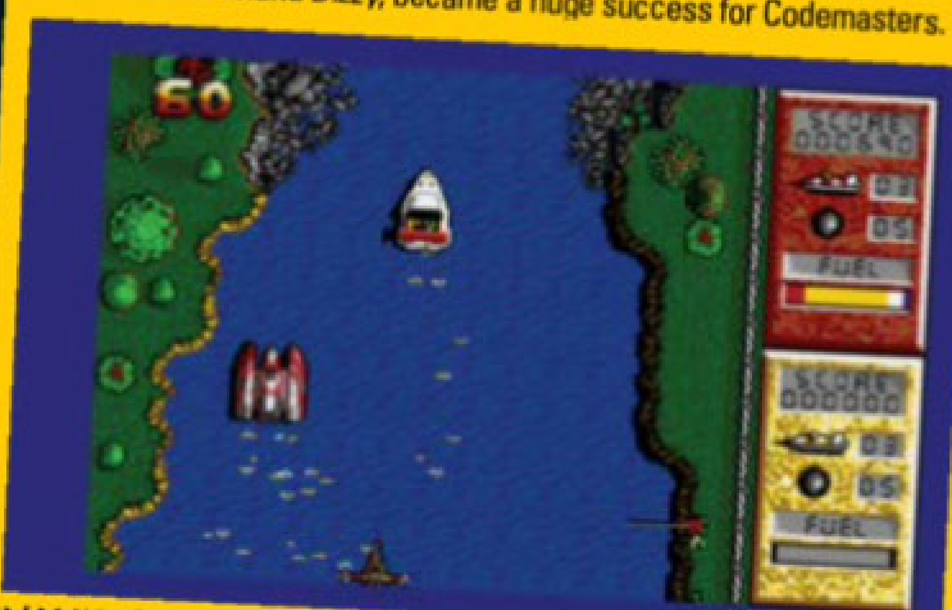




» [Amstrad] Although the original *Dizzy* was a slow burner, the sequel, *Treasure Island Dizzy*, became a huge success for Codemasters.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Ghost Hunters*, with its sampled audio, was one of the collaborations between the Darlings and the Oliver twins.



» [AMIGA] *Pro Powerboat Simulator* was one of many sims produced by Codemasters because they sold so well.



» [CPC] Not all of Codemasters' simulators had a 'point', but *Fruit Machine Simulator* was still good fun despite the lack of cash winnings.

SELECTED TIMELINE

GAMES

- **Space Walk** [C64, MSX, Spectrum] 1984
- **Magic Carpet** [C64, Spectrum] 1984
- **The Last V8** [C64, Amstrad CPC] 1985
- **BMX Simulator** [Various] 1986
- **Super Stuntman** [C64, Amstrad CPC, Spectrum] 1987
- **Pro Powerboat Simulator** [Various] 1989
- **Italia 1990** [Amiga, Atari ST] 1990
- **Game Genie device** [NES] 1990
- **Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament** [Various] 1994
- **J-Cart device** [Mega Drive] 1994
- **Colin McRae Rally** [PlayStation, Game Boy Color, Windows] 1998

like a music company working with musicians. We were not employing huge numbers of people but we were trying to find the best teams, looking to license the games off them and pay them royalties. On the tapes, we used to put a paragraph asking for people with a great game to send us a demo. We were genuinely interested. That's how we originally met the Oliver twins. It was at a computer show where we had a stand looking for programmers. We were interested in looking at demos because that's how we were getting the highest quality games.

Why did you make so many simulators – *BMX Simulator* was your first game, wasn't it?
It was really when me and Richard used to work and make games for Mastertronic. We commissioned lots of games from other programmers and most of the games were about science fiction because a lot of programmers were interested in it. They would make up science fiction stories and make space-orientated games and stuff based around fantasy. But when we analysed the sales figures at Mastertronic we realised it was games like *BMX Racers* that had been selling well. Richard wrote that game and at that stage, lots of kids were interested in BMX bikes and skateboarding. We thought programmers should not make games they were interested in but games that players were interested in and so when we formed Codemasters we wanted to code games that would have wide appeal. So we had *Grand Prix Simulator* and even *Fruit Machine Simulator*.

Did simulators interest you from a coding perspective, though?
Me and Richard were quite into motor racing – go-kart racing – and we used to go to Silverstone and Brands Hatch. At school we were really interested in Physics, so simulating something in real life and making the physics as accurate as possible was important to us. We carried that through Codemasters with games like *Colin McRae Rally*.

Did you have any ideas for simulators that you though were too 'far out'?
I'm not sure. I think we essentially did everything we had thought of. *Fruit Machine Simulator* was the most wacky. I think it went over the line of what was realistic and it was just a bit too fantasy. But people were really interested in arcades and fruit machines so it was a successful product, just not in the sense of having proper physics.

In those early years, you really began to make a name for yourselves...
We had been generating our own publicity at Galactic Software and that was getting us attention which we didn't mind. We were interviewed by Jonathan Ross' brother, Paul, for a documentary and we did stuff for *TVSW* [*Television South West*]. We were on the television a lot because people were interested in computers and how people made games.

Can you remember any television appearances in particular?
We went on a kids' show called *Number 73* which was a Saturday morning thing about people living in a house. There was some thing called 'True or False' where they came up with facts about our story and people had to work out if it was true or not. But we just wanted as much publicity as we could get for the games. When people were interested in interviewing us, we were happy to go on TV. We hired a PR company in London called Lynne Franks and they got us in all of the magazines like *Marie Claire* and the newspapers. That's when the whole 'whiz kids' story went around.

> "The industry is like painting pictures and there's always inspiration"
> David Darling

At Codemasters you worked with many different teams. Were there any you particularly enjoyed working with?
We were programming and developer-led at Codemasters and we worked with some good developers over the years such as Andrew Graham, who did *Micro Machines*; Peter Williamson, who formed Supersonic Software; and Gavin Raeburn, who was the racing studio executive producer and who now works on the *Forza Horizon* games. There was Paul Adams who founded Full Fat and the Oliver twins and Falcus Brothers, too. We attracted a lot of the really good teams of people and they were all great fun to work with. But a lot of people moved to America and there was a bit of a brain drain for them, with a few going to LucasArts.

Was it frustrating to see people leave?
Yes, but people don't do something forever and the world is global and international. People move around a lot more. It's something we have to live with.

» [C64] Before Codemasters, the Darling brothers worked for Mastertronic on games such as *Space Walk*.





Did you have development problems with unfinished or cancelled projects?
Not because people were leaving but we did work on a really good update to the Game Genie which never got launched, so that was frustrating. It was ahead of its time and it enabled the users to generate their own codes so that would have been successful. We worked on a snowboarding game in 1997 for a few years and we had some of the best snowboarders as advisors and that game didn't get finished. We did a MMO called *Dragon Empires* which we worked on for five years but that didn't get finished either. Sometimes it's hard to finish a game and get it perfect and the timing right.

What affects that?
You just have to keep the developers and the marketing people interested in a game. When the platforms or marketplace changes sometimes things disappear under your feet.

Did any of the games you made go unpublished?
I don't think so. We were writing games in the earlier days and they were taking a month or two to write, so pretty much all of them were published. It was quite new and you could publish most things but it didn't mean it would sell millions each year.

Was that the aim, though: to sell millions?
The philosophy was always to ensure the quality was high, even though the games were £1.99 or £2.99. It was to be the best in class so if we were doing a skateboarding game, we wanted it to be the best whereas a lot of companies just wanted to do a skateboarding game. They were more sales led. I've always thought that if sales people are running a company then it is not always a good thing. Sometimes they are more interested in market share or price but we always wanted to add a new feature. *BMX Simulator* was the first game where you could use two joysticks and have two others on the keyboard; a four-player game. Later on we had the J-Carts that allowed you to plug in four joypads so we could have eight people on the Sega Mega Drive and we did for *Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament*. We were always trying to make the best games and be innovative.



» The Game Genie caused David much stress thanks to a court battle with Nintendo.

Did the CD games pack fit into that?
Yes. We put about 40 games on a CD and it was a challenge. Ted Carron, co-inventor of Game Genie designed an interface that allowed the signal to be converted to one that the C64, Spectrum and Amstrad could understand.

> "Most people thought [the NES] was a joke because it had low-res graphics and it was like a toy" David Darling

You also had compilations with the *Quattro* series, didn't you?
We did. We wanted to provide good value to the consumer because when you launched a game in those days you had either a failure that wouldn't chart or a success that would go into the charts, rise as high as you could make it and then after a few weeks drop out. Great games were not selling after a few weeks or months but we knew there was new people buying games all the time. So we thought *Quattro* was a way of bringing the catalogue back in a repackage.



» David Darling in combat gear, pictured for the publicity shots for *Farm Fighters* on iOS in 2013.

Do you think there were two Codemasters? The budget eras of the Eighties and early Nineties and then the full-price era?
There were big differences between those periods but the value of the company was always to make the best game we could whether *BMX Racing* or *Colin MacRae*. To start with we were doing games for the Spectrum and the Commodore 64 for £1.99 because we learned how to sell them when working at Mastertronic and we knew there was a market for them. Then the markets changed with the NES and consoles and then the games had to get more expensive. Prices were much higher for manufacturing. So if we wanted to make the transition from home computer to console, we didn't have much choice. But we kept the same values to make the best games we could. I think the platform has changed and the price point changed but we were not trying to make loads of money or market share. Our main focus was always making the highest quality games.

Have there been any real low points though?
I think the Game Genie court case. We won it but it was like a two-sided coin. We'll never know if it was touch-and-go for Codemasters – we just know that Nintendo lost and the Game Genie was successful so it's hard to know what would have happened the other way around. Winning took away the injunction and the legal stress, though, and it enabled the toy company to launch it. The Game Genie became America's fifth best selling toy that year and it did $140 million at retail.

Did Codemasters think about making its own rival console?
Yes. The Game Genie engineer came up with some preliminary designs for consoles but we thought it was just too big a project really. You'd need massive resources to do it so it wasn't something we went into.

Were you involved with the home computer-based consoles at all – the Commodore 64GS or Amstrad GX4000.
No, not really. We had been going to the CES in Chicago and Vegas and, for a couple of years, people had been talking about 16-bit machines like the Amiga. But then suddenly there was a console called the NES. Most people thought it was a joke because it had low-res graphics and it was like a toy. But then we went to the next show and it exploded. You could buy the NES in gas stations and video shops. It went mass market overnight. That is why we decided to get into console. Nintendo and Sega were creating such a massive market. With the Commodore and Amstrad, the market just wasn't big enough.

Did the consoles push you to full-price games?
We had moved to higher prices from £1.99 to £2.99 because of inflation. With 16-bit, the manufacturing costs of floppy discs was higher than on cassette and it also took longer to make a 16-bit game so the development costs were higher. We moved to £4.99 on 16-bit. But Nintendo manufacturing costs were $10 to $20 and we couldn't retail under $20. Retailer's would buy at $20 and double the price to $39.99. There was no getting around it.

***Dizzy* moved over to consoles as a franchise but it didn't last long. Why was that?**
The original *Dizzy* had an internal popularity. People loved the character. So the Oliver twins did the sequel, *Treasure Island*, and then *Fantasy World Dizzy* and *Magicland Dizzy*, based on fairytales and famous stories. At £1.99, the kids and players could collect these. They were fairly regular and inexpensive. But on console the price was higher and the development times elongated. Suddenly we didn't have two things that helped make the series successful. Another issue was that *Dizzy* was popular in the UK but not so successful in other countries. Codemasters was moving away from only competing with Elite and Domark and other UK companies and it was competing against EA, Konami, Sega and Nintendo. The market was suddenly international and *Dizzy* wasn't internationally famous.



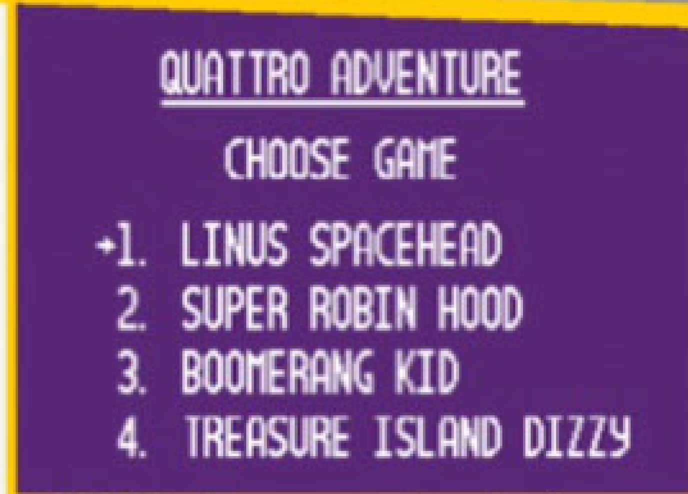
» Richard and David Darling taking part in their favourite pursuit, go-karting.



» [NES] *Super Robin Hood* was an early classic that was also ported.



» [NES] Codemasters moved from computers to console as *Dizzy* on the NES showed.



» [NES] The *Quattros* were themed and represented absolutely brilliant value for money.

You had a fair amount of success with the PlayStation, didn't you?
Yes, Nintendo was the first mass-market console after Atari and then Sega but they were both really restrictive in how they would license games. Nintendo had 50 licences and most were Japanese. We did have problems with that in the past but then when Sony launched it decided to try and work *with* the community rather than fight against the community. Phil Harrison and the Sony guys were really friendly and they encouraged and promoted the PlayStation as the first proper 3D machine. They were really good to work with and they recognised that we had been successful in the past and they encouraged us to make the best games we could.

But you and your brother ultimately sold Codemasters. So what is Richard up to now?
You'll have to ask him, I think. He's quite a private individual so he wouldn't feel comfortable with me speaking on his behalf.

Was it a joint decision, though?
We had been doing it for more than 20 years. We started in 1986 and we sold in 2007 and we enjoyed it every year. But it's good to do more than one thing in your life so me, my brother and my dad were the main shareholders and we were all in agreement.



» David's 'Absolutely Brilliant!' slogan became so popular, Codemasters would parody itself.

What did you do next?
I went into robotics. I'm really interested in robotics and I have been since I was at school. I would read the Arthur C. Clarke books and other sci-fi. When we sold Codemasters I thought I could get back into robotics but I didn't get it off the ground. It was just an idea and I didn't really make a business out of it.

Why did you eventually decide to go back into gaming with Kwalee?
I realised what I liked making most of was games. I didn't want to start a new company and make physical media games for the consoles because then you need warehouses and stock control and logistical infrastructure all over the world. It seems old fashioned when you have the iPhone with instant digital distribution. So I was keen to make games and I was quite excited about doing digital distribution. There are thousands of competitors all over the world and it's not the easiest thing but if you can come up with something innovative then there is the potential to get to hundreds of millions of people.

Has Kwalee been successful?
So far we have had moderate success and we have had lots of downloads but not a massive hit. We've had the whole team working on a new product in the last few years so that has huge potential. We want to get it right before we announce and launch it. We have just launched a new version of *Farm Fighters*, our multiplayer ballistics iOS game, though, and we are recruiting for programmers and a UI Artist for our new project. If any readers are skilled and interested, then do contact me via our website.

Is the opportunity for making games as good today as ever? We've heard both success and failure stories from many developers.
There's always opportunity. My granddad said he was born 100 years too early and would have loved to be around now with today's technology. But I would want to be around in 100 years. There are always opportunities, you just have to be in the right place at the right time and work really hard.

YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

Some of our forum members posed Absolutely Brilliant questions

Merman: Were there any games you turned down that you wished you had published?

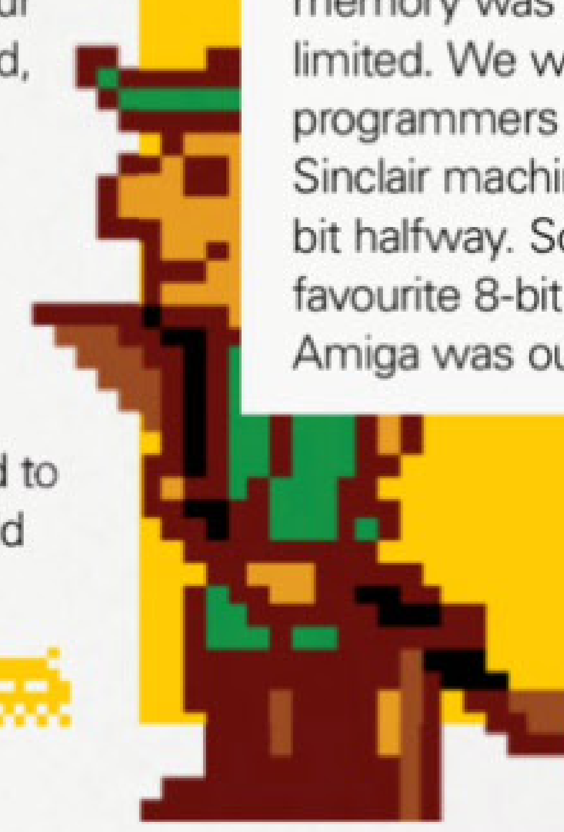
There have been a few games that we have looked at and not ended up getting, but the biggest one was *Guitar Hero*. We were offered it and we really liked it but they offered it to a few people. It was snapped up really quickly and that was one that got away from Codemasters. Usually before something is famous you look at it and find it hard to assess, but we thought *Guitar Hero* was amazing and it turned out to be very successful.

Hiro: Codemasters was one of the few companies that supported the Commodore 16, how was it to program and release on that platform? Were sales satisfying?

The fact that English is our native language made it easier for our developers than for non-native English speakers. We also have an entrepreneurial engineering tradition that perhaps our teenagers hooked into. The ZX80/ZX81/ZX Spectrum made the technology affordable and gave us a head start.

TheDude18: Which of the 8-bit machines did you think were 'Absolutely Brilliant!' and why?

We were Commodore fans so the Commodore 64 was our favourite machine. The VIC-20 was really nice but the characters were quite big, the memory was small and the colours limited. We worked with Spectrum programmers but we didn't program the Sinclair machines. The Amstrad was a bit halfway. So, yes, the C64 was our favourite 8-bit and the Commodore Amiga was our favourite 16-bit.



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Darran Jones
Editor

At **Retro Gamer** we've always been proud of our scoring system, but we wanted to create something that would be just as relevant to you, the reader. We now have that system. As of this issue, **Retro Gamer's** reviews will be using the new scoring network, Just A Score. Don't worry: the scores found over the following pages will remain our own and they still come from the same trustworthy and reputable source. But now with the free Just A Score app, for the first time ever, you can follow our scores, like them, and submit your own scores for us and others to like. It's a fantastic new system that will enable you to tell us exactly what you like and will hopefully allow you to know what your fellow **Retro Gamer** readers enjoy. Let's do everything we can to ensure that *Strider* gets a perfect ten!



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» The team are discussing what score they should give Nintendo's Robotic Operating Buddy. It's not high…

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retro GAMER PICK OF THE SCORES…



Best Yoshi games

You can score absolutely anything on Just A Score. Our favourite this month has been rating the best games from the Yoshi games series

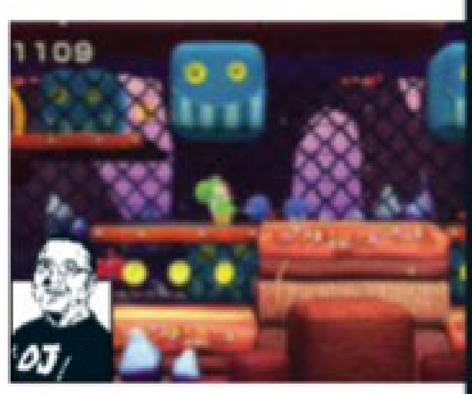
- **9** — RetroGamer_Mag scored **9** for Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island
- **7** — RetroGamer_Mag scored **7** for Yoshi's Wolly World
- **5** — RetroGamer_Mag scored **5** for Yoshi's Safari
- **5** — RetroGamer_Mag scored **5** for Yoshi's Story
- **3** — RetroGamer_Mag scored **3** for Yoshi's Universal Gravitation





>> This month we put Yoshi's latest platformer through its paces. We also crush germs in the latest Dr Mario, go for a run with Sonic and see how the special edition of Devil May Cry 4 holds up

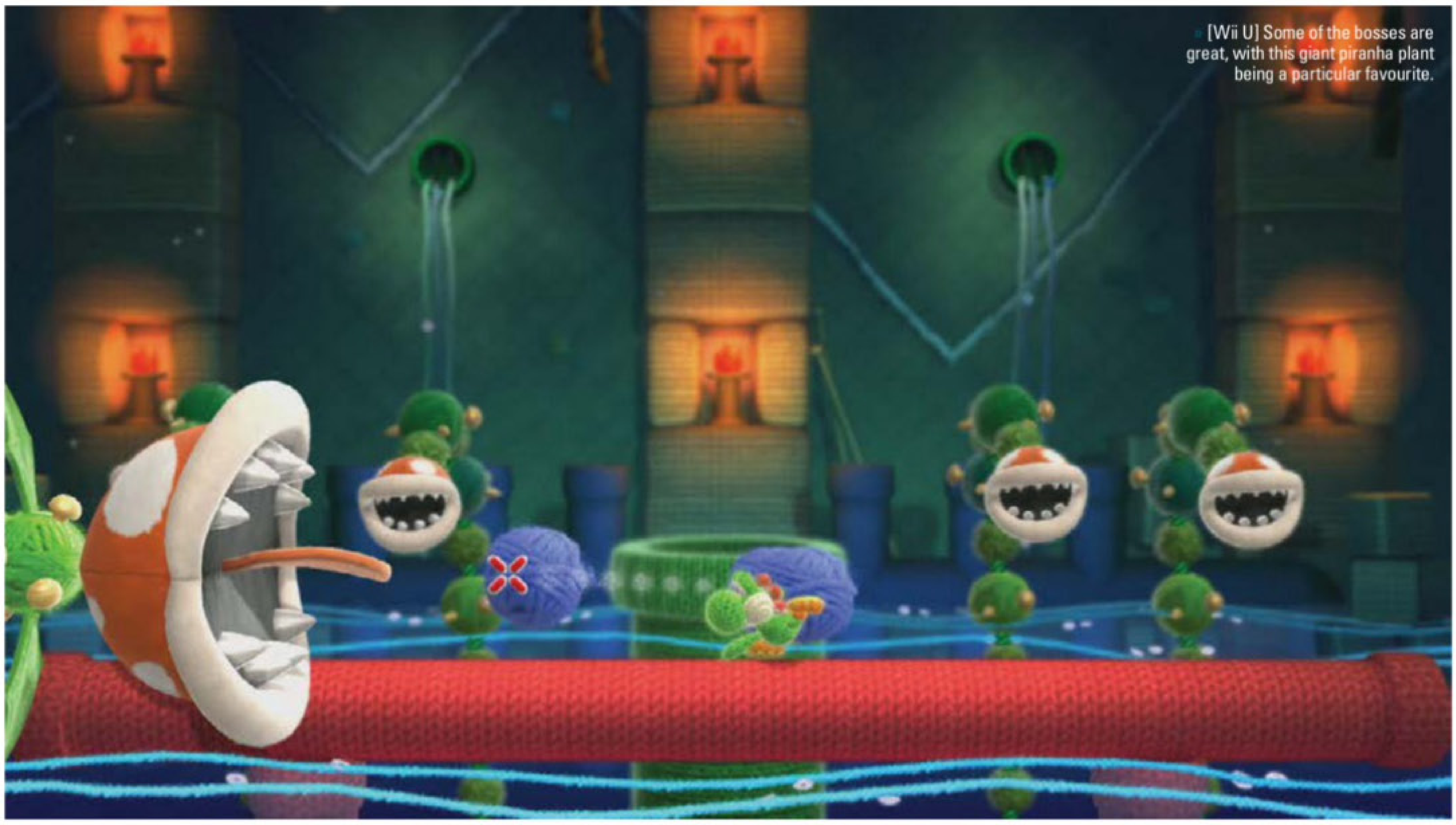
PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Yoshi's Epic Yarn
It might not be the most original platformer that Nintendo has made, but I've still had a blast playing this with my daughter.



NICK
Devil May Cry 4: Special Edition
Capcom has made an effort here and delivered a suitably meaty adventure with lots of new characters to master.



[Wii U] Some of the bosses are great, with this giant piranha plant being a particular favourite.

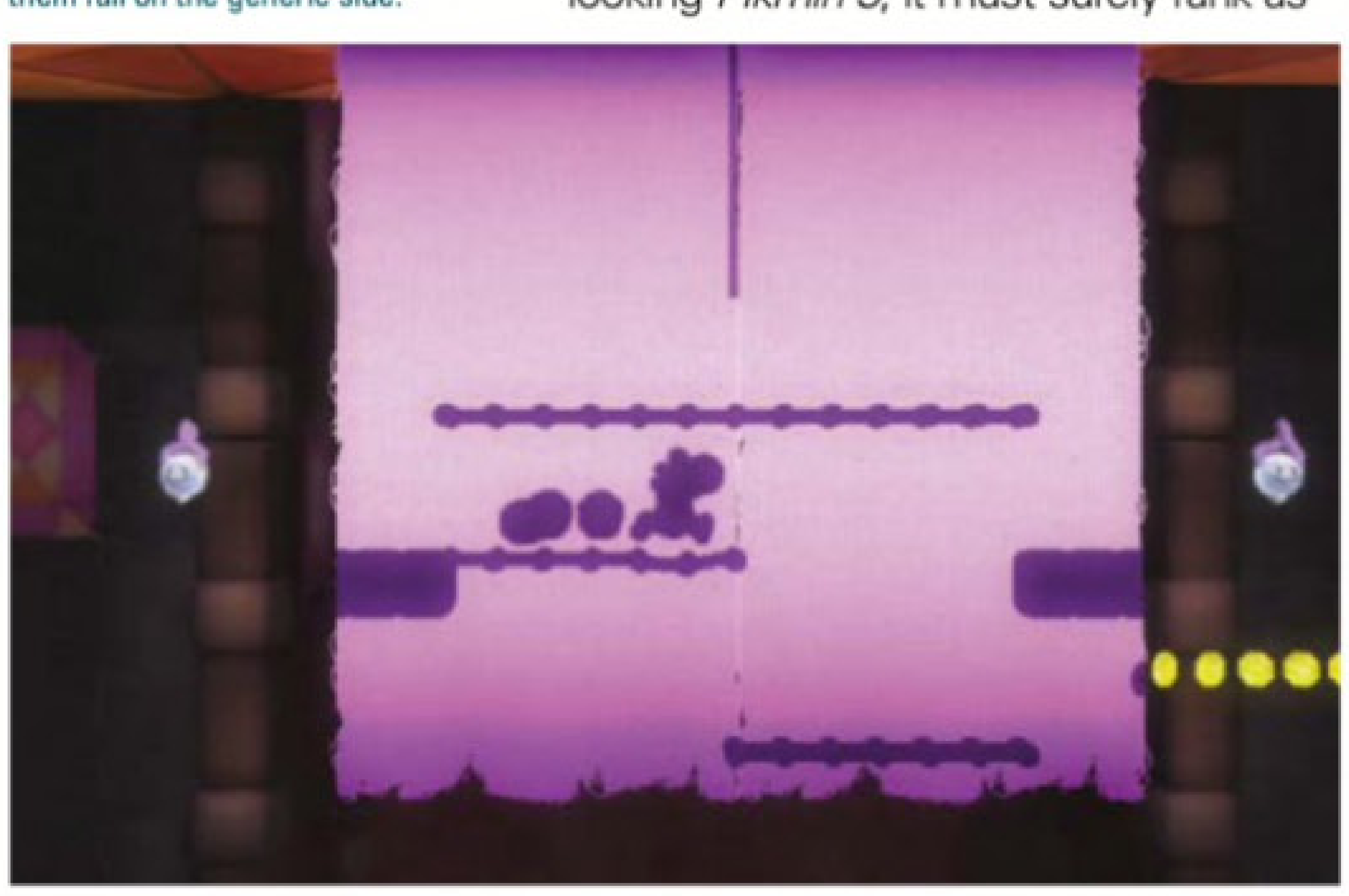
Yoshi's Wooly World

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME

INFORMATION

- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WII U
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £39.99
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** GOOD FEEL
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

» [Wii U] When *Yoshi* tries the level design (like this one) is absolutely superb. Sadly, many of them fall on the generic side.





Kirby's Epic Yarn **proved to be a wonderful little Wii game, taking the core concepts of the popular franchise,** and transporting it to a delightful looking world of felt and fabric. Nintendo's now decided to give the same craftwork treatment to its lovable dinosaur, and while *Yoshi's Wooly World* doesn't quite scale the same lofty heights of that first epic yarn, it remains an incredibly delightful adventure.

Nintendo's official games always tend to look the business on Wii U and *Yoshi's Wooly World* proves itself to be no exception. Alongside the marvellous looking *Pikmin 3*, it must surely rank as one of the best games on the console thanks to its smart stylistic look. Like *LittleBigPlanet*, everything in *Yoshi's Wooly World* appears to have been made from everyday materials and fabrics, even Yoshi and his enemies are stitched together, making them look more adorable than ever. If we wanted to be super picky we'd argue that the sharpness of HD means it doesn't have quite the same impact as *Kirby's Epic Yarn* did because everything looks a little too clean, but there's no denying it delivers some delicious looking visuals. In fact, going back to our original point, it's one of the few games that actually looks decent on the gamepad, as the lower resolution screen gives everything the same warm fuzzy glow that was found in *Kirby's Epic Yarn*.

One of the biggest strengths of *Yoshi's Wooly World* is that it excels in making you want to explore the beautiful environments that Good Feel has created and stuffed with collectibles. At first, flowers and other goodies will be in plain view, but you'll soon find them in some truly devious places. Loose strings can be pulled to unravel hidden areas,

BRIEF HISTORY

» Yoshi first appeared as a trusty mount for Mario in *Super Mario World*. He soon began to appear in other games, including *Mario Kart*, *Mario Party* and *Super Smash Bros.*, but eventually went on to stay in his own games, from the great *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*, to the awful, *Yoshi's Universal Gravitation*.





"Nintendo still makes platformers that are a notch about its peers"

walls dissolve as you walk near them, allowing you to loot the beads inside, while clouds (which hold the majority of hearts that power Yoshi's energy) can be discovered in all sorts of odd places. It's highly unlikely that you'll find everything you need in a single playthrough, but it's so well balanced that you'll happily return to many of the stages in order to fully complete them. Collecting beads is particularly important as they power the new badges found in the game. Complete stages and you'll be awarded badges that range from showing all hidden items to letting you start the level with Yoshi's dog, Poochy. Sadly, you can only pick one at the beginning of a stage and you must have the required amount of beads to use it.

In addition to lots of clever secrets, another nice touch to *Yoshi* is the numerous little mini-games that show up at various times. They're normally all time-based and revolve around Yoshi taking on a new form, be it of a cute aeroplane or mole, and then trying to retrieve as many items as possible. While they break up the action nicely, providing a solid change of pace from the otherwise leisurely platforming, they appear all too rarely. We appreciate that Good Feel wouldn't want them to outstay their welcome, but many of them are so much fun it's a shame they are so well tucked away.

While *Yoshi's Wooly World* is filled with plenty of clever secrets and entertaining mini-games, the main levels are rather more hit and miss. When they're good, they're exceptional, delivering clever touches that make full use of Yoshi's many skills. Eggs can be ricocheted around to collect beads, wool can be thrown at unfinished platforms and pipes to create new places to stand on or explore, while fluffy chicks can be chucked to create streams of billowy clouds that can then be used to discover new areas or simply navigate the levels. Sadly, the inventiveness simply doesn't sustain itself and while each of the available worlds has plenty of standout levels, all too many of them just feel bland and by the numbers. Nintendo still makes 2D platformers that are a notch above its peers, but like *Donkey Kong Country Tropical Freeze*, *Yoshi* feels safe, as if the publisher is just ticking off the boxes in its '*How To Make A Fun Platformer*' book. Hanging off curtains as they swing on rails, pushing snowballs through hordes of enemies and navigating a bizarre two-tone level with disappearing and reappearing platforms are great while they last, but they quickly get forgotten about.

If the level design doesn't always impress, the many bosses you face are generally far more consistent, and while they're rarely massively challenging, they'll certainly give your controller a good workout. As with many Nintendo games they revolve around the rule of three, but many of them use backgrounds in interesting ways. Particularly the fiery hot dog, who leaps backwards so he can belch yarn balls at you from a safe distance. A few of the bosses do eventually repeat, but not enough that they become annoying.

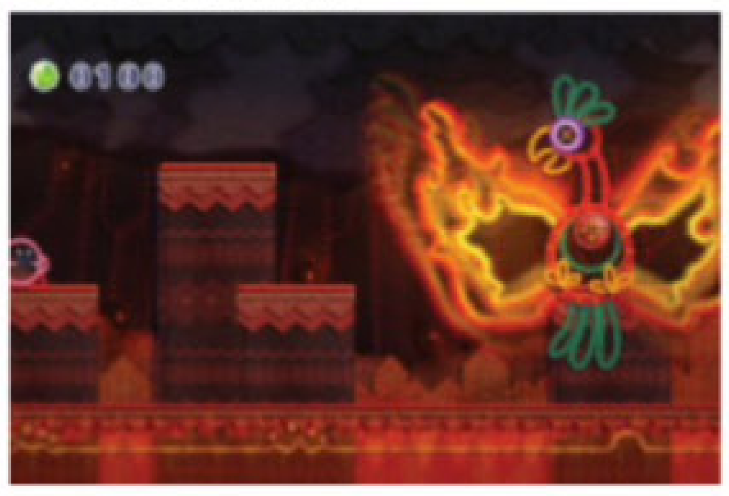
Yoshi's Wooly World may not reinvent the rulebook and it is yet another example of another safe 2D platformer from Nintendo, but it is a good one that fans of the series will definity enjoy playing. ✱

✱WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND (SNES)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
KIRBY'S EPIC YARN (WII)



In a nutshell

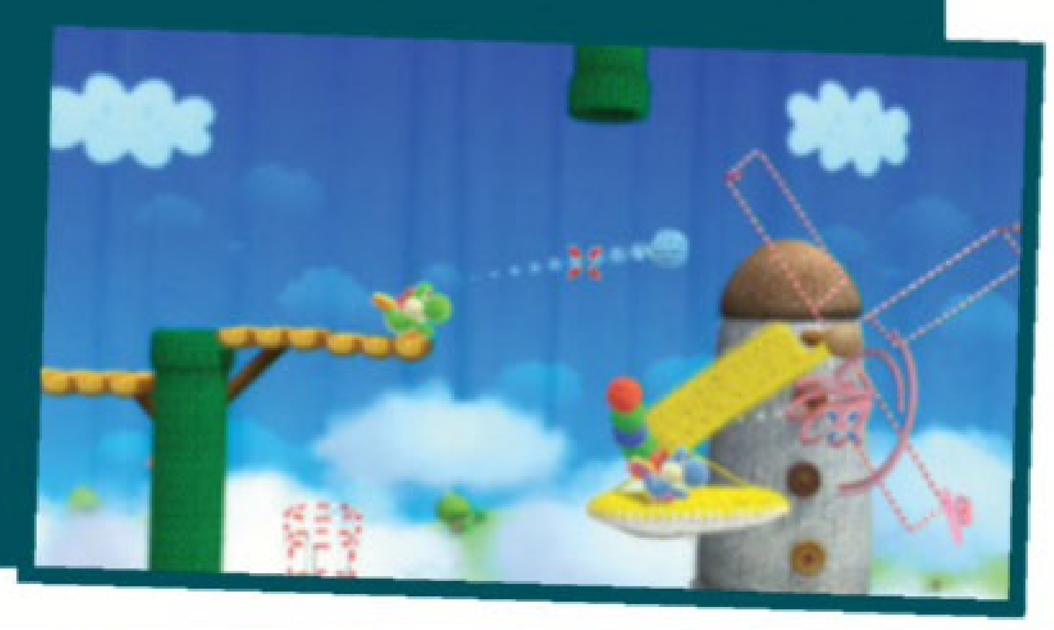
An entertaining platformer that's let down by lacklustre level design. It's certainly not as epic as Kirby's Wii adventure but it will still keep platform fans happy.

RetroGamer_Mag scored **7** for
Yoshi's Wooly World
7
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

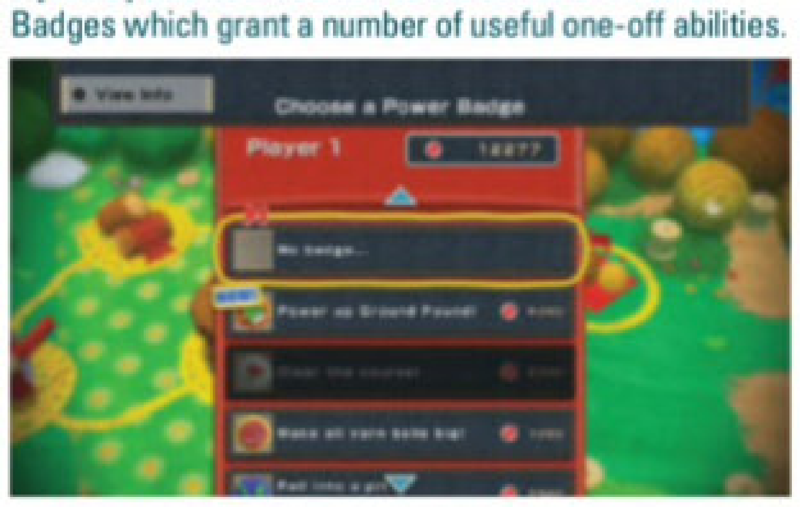
JUST THE TWO OF US

Two Yoshi's are better than one

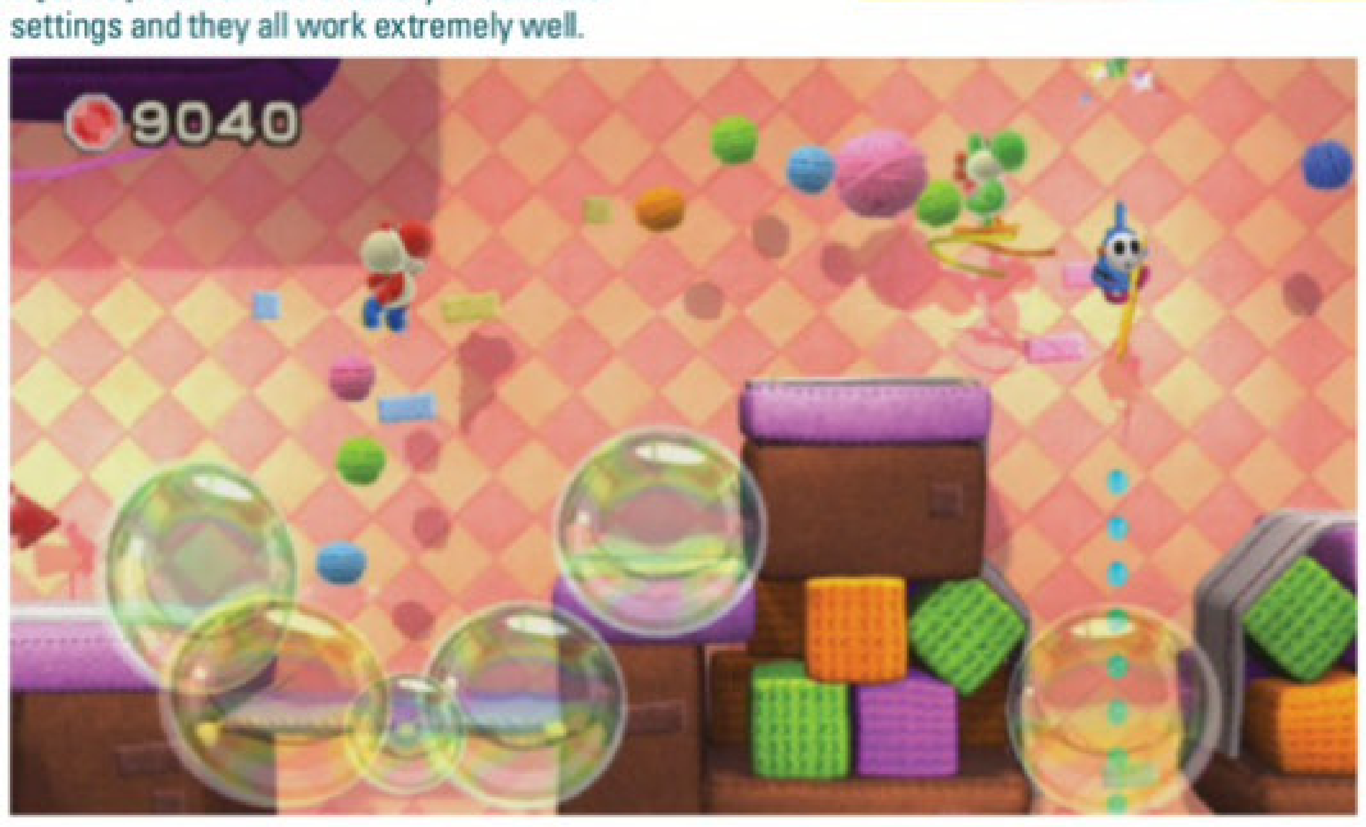
As with *Kirby's Epic Yarn*, *Yoshi's Wooly World* features a two-player mode, and it's good fun, too. While there are still examples where it's too easy to knock your chum off a platform because you can't share the same physical space, the actual way you can use each other to get around the levels is pretty neat. Being able to pick up your mate and throw them makes a massive difference to the gameplay as it enables you to not only navigate otherwise difficult areas, but lets you reach secrets that might be too much effort to collect on your own. Like the main game the inclusion of multiplayer isn't groundbreaking, but it's far less annoying than in some of Nintendo's other platformers.

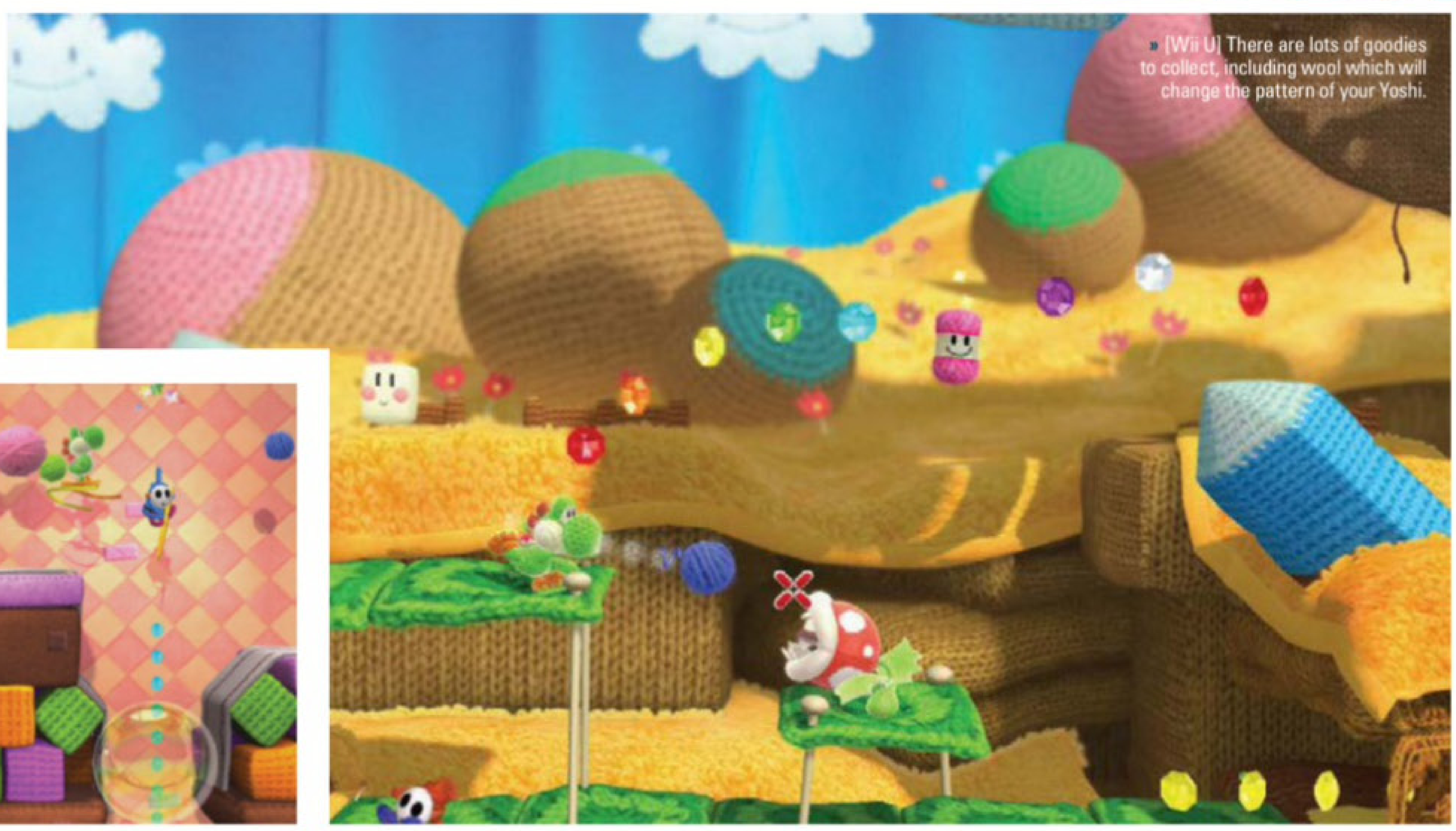


» [Wii U] One new addition to the series are Power Badges which grant a number of useful one-off abilities.



» [Wii U] You can use a variety of controller settings and they all work extremely well.





» [Wii U] There are lots of goodies to collect, including wool which will change the pattern of your Yoshi.

RETROROUND-UP

>> Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download



PICK OF THE MONTH

Dr Mario: Miracle Cure

» **System:** 3DS » **Cost:** £8.99 » **Buy it from:** eShop

A decade ago, you'd have been forgiven for thinking that Nintendo had forgotten all about Dr Mario, but since the 2008 release of *Dr Mario & Germ Buster* the series has been back in good health. This latest title continues that trend, bringing together the original virus-busting puzzle gameplay alongside the odd L-shaped capsule formations of the Wii U's *Dr Luigi*. However, the big new advance comes in the form of the Miracle Cures, power-ups which have a variety of effects, from clearing all capsules of one colour to bombs which blow up anything nearby. The additions are well-judged, proving helpful without unbalancing the game.

Despite the budget price, a sizeable amount of content has been packed into *Dr Mario: Miracle Cure*. As well as the classic stage-based and endless gameplay modes, the game offers dozens of predefined challenge stages to keep you busy. Some stages offer puzzles with a clear objectives, while others are simply tricky arrangements that will test your skills – one particularly nasty stage forces you to drop capsules between two solid towers of viruses.

For the more competitive amongst you, the game offers local multiplayer well as four online multiplayer variants – Dr Mario or Dr Luigi, with or without Miracle Cures. We managed decent connections with players, but you might wait a while to find a game – there's no option to pick a random mode and no indication of how many players are waiting, so you'll have to take a chance that other people want to play the same way you do. On the bright side, each rule set has its own rankings, so experimenting won't ruin your standing.

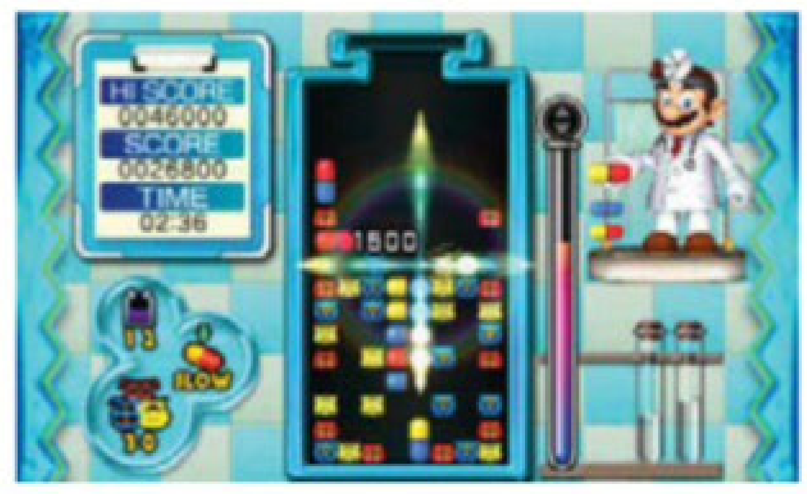
If your 3DS has been diagnosed with a puzzle deficiency, *Dr Mario: Miracle Cure* is an effective prescription – it's the definitive version of the game, and comes in at an excellent price.

RetroGamer_Mag scored **8** for
Dr Mario: Miracle Cure
8
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



» [3DS] Miracle Cure icons are strictly functional, but you'll never mistake them for each other.

> **"A sizeable amount of content has been packed into Dr Mario"**



» [3DS] Miracle Cures can be helpful in reaching tricky viruses, or just creating some room.



» [3DS] You can see when the next Miracle Cure is due – and what it'll be – on the right-hand bar.



Sonic Runners

» **System:** iOS (tested) Android
» **Buy it for:** Free (in-app purchases)
» **Buy it from:** Appstore, GooglePlay

Sonic Team's first *Sonic* game on iOS is a shambles. The endless running is decent, utilising the wisps from *Sonic Colours*, while delivering decent level design and a respectable combo system. While it's not as money grabbing as many freemium games, *Sonic Runners* does bombard you with ads. It's also marred by annoying loading screens and some poorly-designed menus that means the action is damaged by long waits. Ultimately, *Sonic Runners* is ruined by poor optimisation that means you're at the mercy of the frame-rate, which makes cheap deaths a common experience. Stick with *Sonic Dash* instead.

RetroGamer_Mag scored **4** for
Sonic Runners
4
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



Devil May Cry 4: Special Edition

» **System:** Xbox One (tested) PS4, PC
» **Buy it for:** 19.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

It's astonishing to think that the *DMC* franchise has been around for 14 years. It soon becomes apparent when you play this meaty special edition, because even though it came out in 2008, many aspects of *DMC 4* feel dated. The combat remains fluid, virtually on par with modern action games like *Bayonetta 2*, but the constant backtracking, inability to progress until all enemies are defeated and an over reliance on the same bosses means Capcom's game quickly shows its age. The three new characters, Virgil, Trish and Lady, all play completely different too each other, and the fighting is top notch, but it can't hide the weak level design.

RetroGamer_Mag scored **7** for
Devil May Cry 4 (Special Edition)
7
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



Arcade Archives Gradius

» **System:** PS4 » **Buy it for:** £7.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN

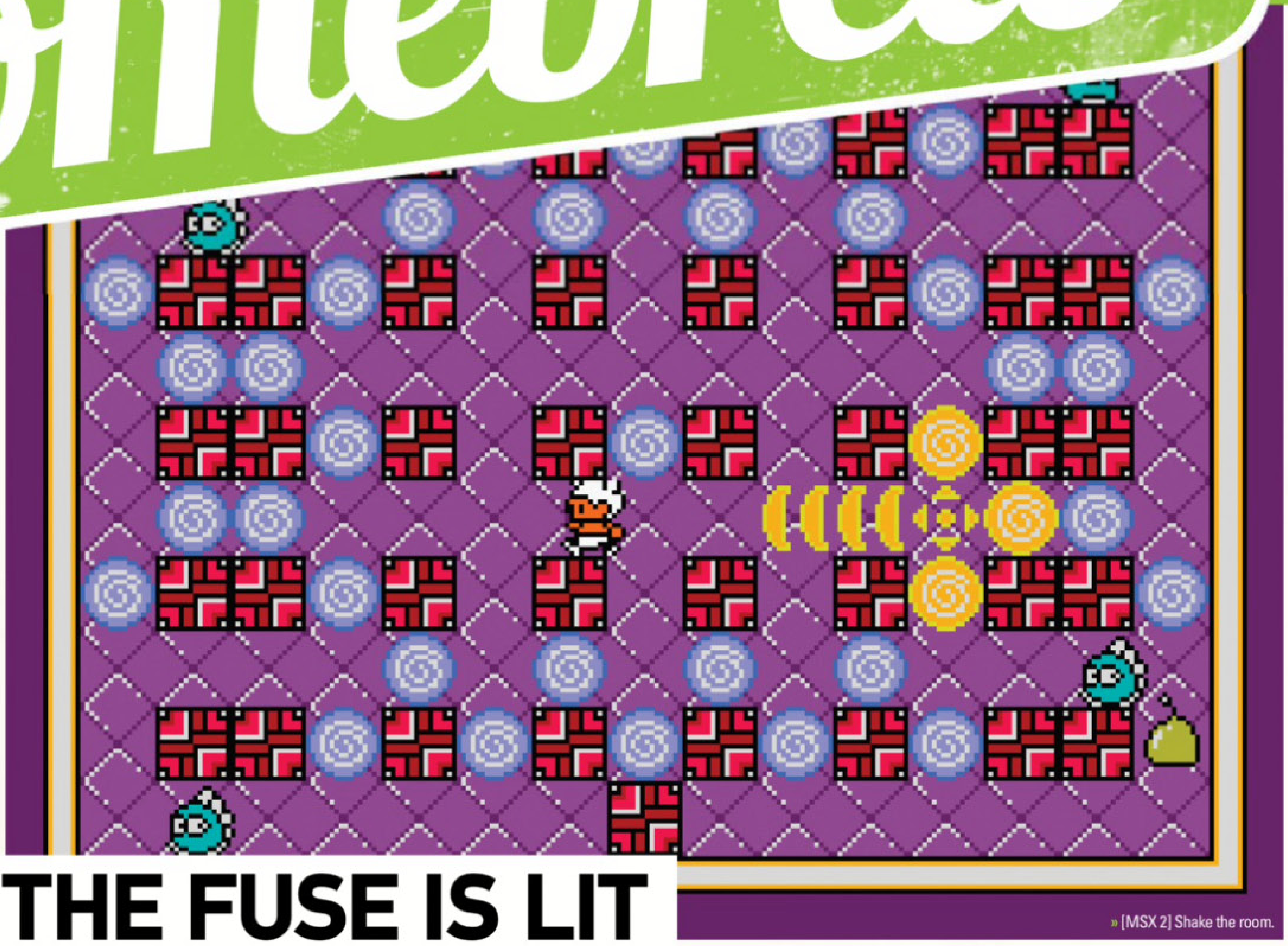
Although the *Arcade Archives* brand is already well established on the PlayStation 4 in Japan and America, Europeans are somewhat behind. Only two games are currently available, with *Crazy Climber* being the other alternative, which is something of a shame. We've only played *Gradius* so far, but the emulation is superb, doing a solid job of capturing the original arcade game in all its glory. *Gradius* remains an excellent shooter too, although it is showing its age a little. While there are online leaderboards and the ability to share videos the actual asking price is incredibly steep for what's being offered, particularly when titles like *Gradius V* are available on PSN for the same price.

RetroGamer_Mag scored **6** for
Arcade Archives Gradius
6
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

Welcome to Homebrew



>> 'Make This' is a bit different this issue because, rather than me racking my brains for something, RG forumite kelp7 asked me to cover something specific. I'm slightly surprised if I haven't said this, but if anyone has a topic they'd like to see covered, get in touch either through the regular contact email or the RG forums where my user name is TMR



» [MSX 2] Shake the room.

THE FUSE IS LIT

There does seem to have been a surprising number of *Bomberman*-style games released for the 8-bit and 16-bit systems of late including *Kaboom!* for the Apple II by Ninja Force and Gábor Varga's *Xplode Man* on the Plus/4, each with their own take on the successful formula. And the most recent addition to this growing collection is *Booming Boy* for the MSX 2, which has been put together by the people behind MSX magazine, *MSX Area*, to be manufactured on cartridge and distributed by Repro Factory.

Explaining the rules of the game is probably like taking coals to Newcastle, but the basic idea is that the player-controlled Booming Boy plants explosive devices with timers that detonate to smash apart the destructible bits of the playfield and dispose of roaming enemies. The latter targets are more important since they need to be killed in order to progress through the levels, and there's a fairly strict time limit to keep the player focused on that task. Clearing the otherwise harmless background blocks is helpful to open up the playfield and will sometimes reveal useful power-ups that increase the number and blast radius of the bombs.

The developers are offering a playable preview of *Booming Boy* from their website. This is the kind of thing that we're always pleased to see since it allows MSX 2 owners to give the game a quick blast before they make a purchase. The game also showcases its musical theme graphically with the bombs as glowing musical notes and, presumably, the explosions being sound waves so the DJ Jazzy Jeff And The Fresh Prince reference we're using as a screenshot caption is more appropriate than usual! More information about the physical release and where to buy it can be found at the MSX Area website behind Kikstart.eu/booming-msx along with that playable demo.

> "The developers are offering a playable preview of Booming Boy"

Incoming

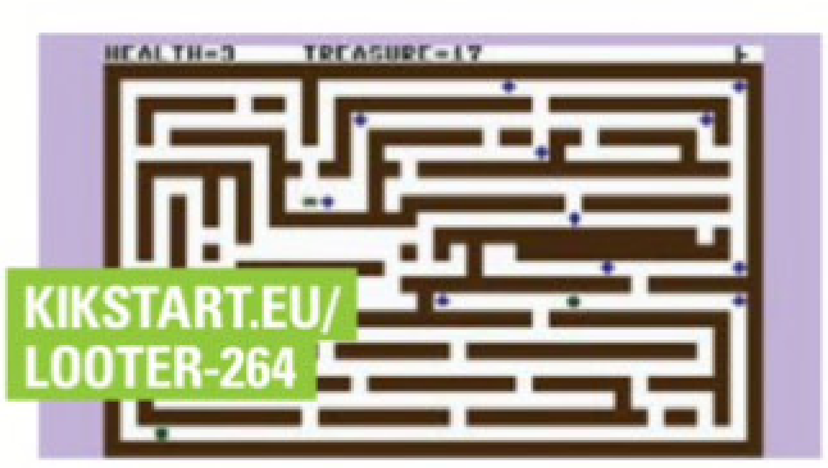
More goodies to look out for, including a dungeon crawler for the C64 and a Spectrum puzzle game

KIKSTART.EU/ZEN2-SPEC



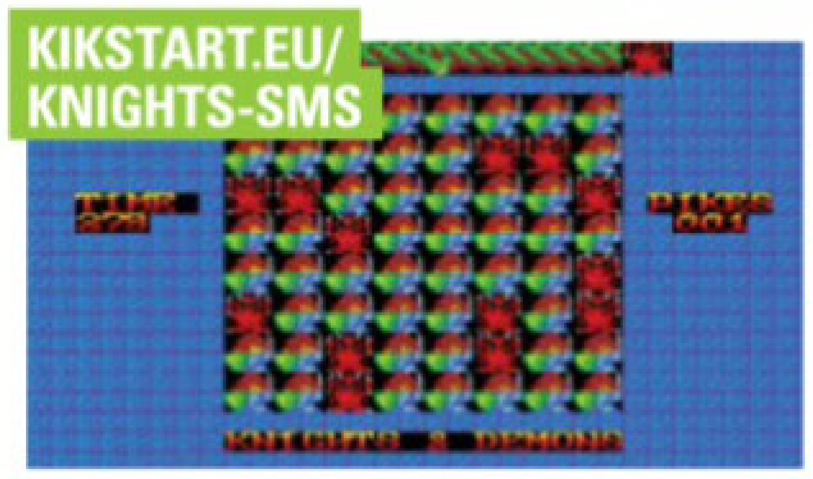
▲ Einar Saukas has released *Zen 2*, a sequel to his circuit-based puzzle game from 2014 on the Spectrum.

▼ Looter for the Plus/4 is a simple maze game which was converted from the C64 by developer Online Professor.



KIKSTART.EU/LOOTER-264

KIKSTART.EU/KNIGHTS-SMS



▲ Kabuto Factory's puzzle game *Knights And Demons* has been released for the Sega Master System.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

OWLS WELL THAT ENDS WELL

Gradual Games' *The Legends Of Owlia* is an action RPG similar in style to games like *The Legend Of Zelda* and it has been in development since 2012, working from ideas the programmer had during the Nineties. The player's character is a woman called Adlanniel who is ably assisted by her familiar, an owl called Tyto, who can be used to attack enemies or perform other tasks.

Kikstart.eu/owlia-prv-nes goes to a blog at the dev's website where the demo can be downloaded and there's a teaser video to watch. The final game is due on cartridge this year.



» [NES] Getting in a flap.



» [TI-99/4A] Willy struts his stuff in style.

A FINE TIN ROOF

TI-99/4A programmer Rasmus Moustgaard – whose previous works include *Titanium* and *Road Hunter* – has recently been focusing his efforts on converting some classic titles over to the TI. His latest project is a version of *Jet Set Willy* which is based on the Spectrum version but rewritten from scratch.

At the time of writing this, there seems to be a cycle of bug finding and fixing going on over in the Atari Age discussion thread behind Kikstart.eu/jsw-texas but we have had a quick play of the latest download that Rasmus has made available and it feels very faithful to the Matthew Smith original.

▼ Developed by a dad to teach his son about programming, *Dungeon Crawl* is, unsurprisingly, a dungeon crawler!

KIKSTART.EU/ DUNGEON-CRAWL-C64



Homebrew heroes

C64 developer Antonio Savona was behind the 2014 RGCD competition entry, P0 Snake, and the newly released 64K cartridge version. We slithered over for a quick chat about control schemes and returning to C64 coding





» [C64] Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle.

So where did the idea for *P0 Snake*'s control scheme come from?
I wanted to make a simple *Snake* game but I also wanted to write this one-button control craze that's all over the place.

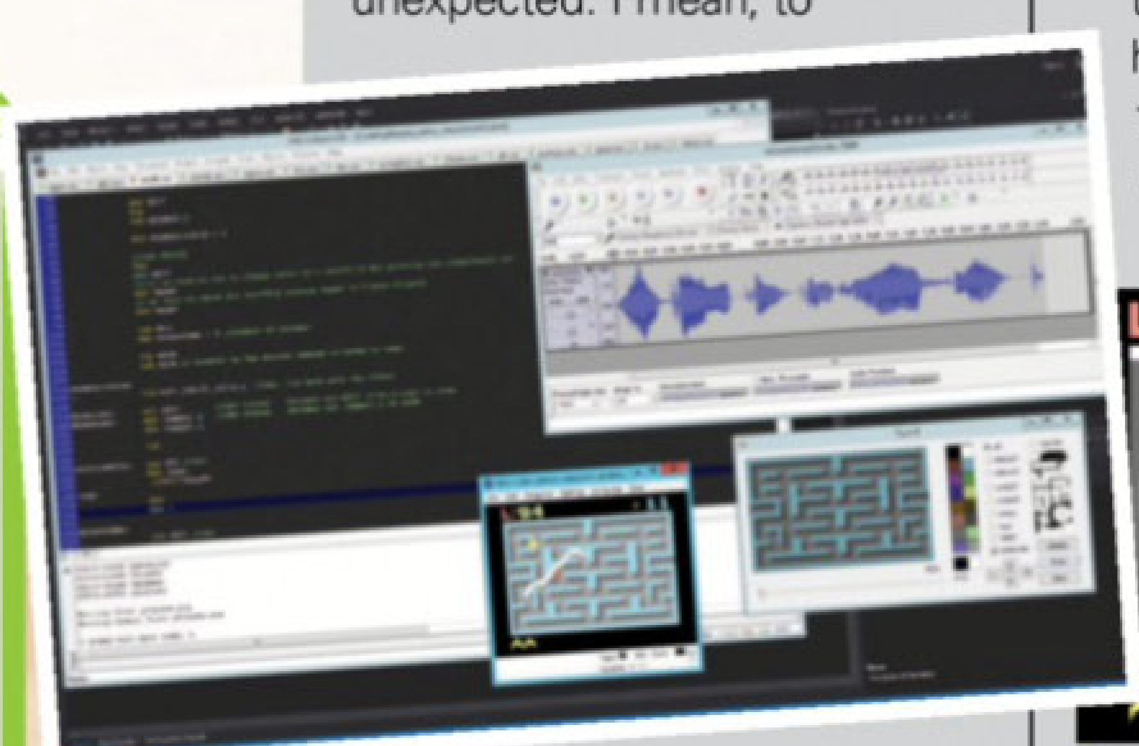
How long did the original 16K version of *P0 Snake* take to write?
From start to finish I think it was seven months. I probably worked about two or three hours each day on average, mostly in the evening after work. It wasn't all about 6510 assembler, of course, as with many modern retro productions; I had to implement a few bespoke cross-development tools, like the level editor or the speech encoder.

And how much time have you put into the expanded version?
By the time I had finished the 16K version I had all the aforementioned tools already available and my assembler skills had come back to my teenage-self proficiency levels (and then some), so it took me less than two months to implement the new features and fix the glitches of the 16K version.

And what kind of feedback have you had so far from the game's players?
It was awesome, and totally unexpected. I mean, to know that there are people out there actually playing your game is something that I just can't get used to. They specifically praise the balance of the difficulty curve, which makes me very happy as I invested a lot of time testing that aspect. I wanted the game to be challenging, but not frustrating. One hilarious piece of feedback that I got from different players is that they find the controls easier after a couple of beers. I found that interesting and worrying at the same time.

You had quite a break from C64 coding, what drew you back to it?
In 2013, visiting my parents' house, I rescued the floppies of an unfinished game I was developing in the Eighties, *Block Zone*. I tried to make it work, which took me a lot of time: all the things that must have been perfectly clear to my 16-year-old self were now obscure, to say the least. By the time I managed to finally run it, I had dusted off a lot of my 6510 assembler memories, and upon seeing the sprites moving on the screen I was hooked! I decided that I wanted to finish that game. *P0 Snake* was meant to be a 'programming exercise' to revive my coding skills, but it ended up being the main focus instead. I still want to finish *Block Zone* one day, though!

And what can we expect to see from you in the future?
I have a design document for another simple game along the lines of *P0 Snake*. It should be to *Arkanoid* what *P0 Snake* is to *Nibbler*. I'm not sure it will work as a concept, but I'll give it a try. I would also love to port an unconverted arcade game of the Eighties. I love what Mr Sid did with *Donkey Kong Junior*. Now, I'm no Mr Sid, but I'm hoping to be up to the challenge for something much simpler than that.



» [C64] May require some assembly.



» [C64] Snakes on a teleporter.



» [C64] A new level, but it Pongs.

MAXWELL MOUSE AND THE MISSING GAME MYSTERY

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE AMIGA » **DEVELOPER:** REMAINDER SOFTWARE
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/MAXWELL-AMIGA » **PRICE:** FREE

Some games are epic tales of heroes and heroines battling insurmountable odds to save their people, the planet or on occasion an entire galaxy, but the titular, shade-wearing rodent, Maxwell Mouse, has a slightly more realistic mission. He'd just got his paws on a brand new game for his Amiga the day before and gave it pride of place in his disk box with every intention of having a marathon gaming session on waking the next morning… but the disk vanished during the night! It wasn't in the Amiga's disk drive either, so the only option left is to investigate further, although the first task is going to be getting out of his house.

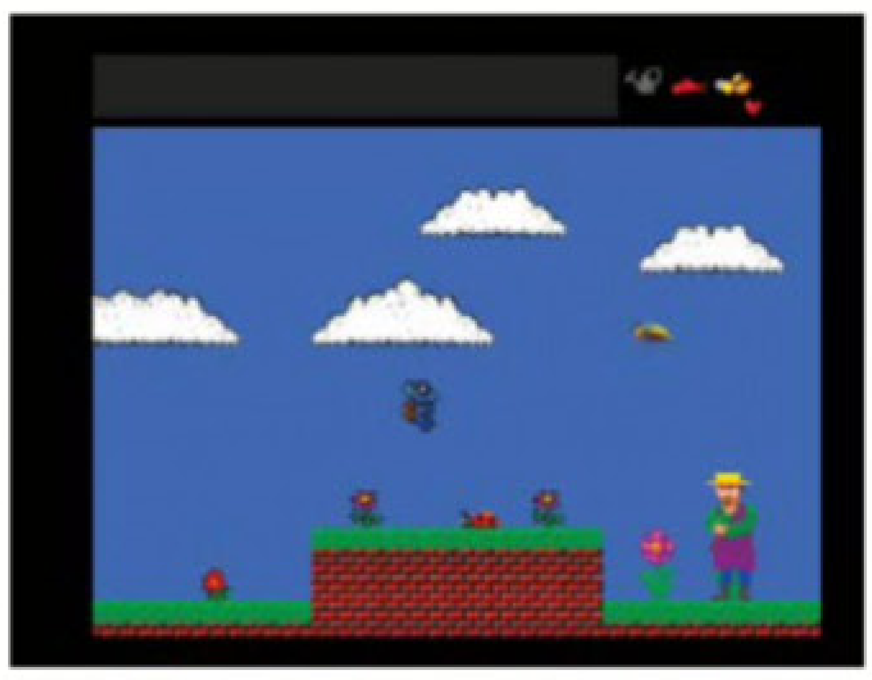
The countryside is a dangerous place, especially if you're a mouse and there's all manner of life crawling or flying around to get in Maxwell's way, but not everything is out to kill him and there are humans who may have information as regards the missing floppy. That said, although these folks may be friendly enough they certainly won't be offering help unless something is done for them first; a few are after gold coins or a copy of a magazine and will, while others are more vague about their wants.

Maxwell's world is very nicely constructed and the gameplay is reminiscent of the *Dizzy* series with objects being picked up and carried to NPCs in order to progress the story. There's a cheekier sense of humour at work here as well, and it isn't afraid to break the fourth wall – the conversation about the virtues of a certain writer for *Amiga Future* made us smile – or take a couple of less than subtle digs at another 16-bit computer, which makes working through the puzzles in this game just that more fun.

RetroGamer_Mag scored **9** for Maxwell Mouse and the Missing Game Mystery
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE


» [Amiga] Cheering people up.

retro GAMER SIZZLER

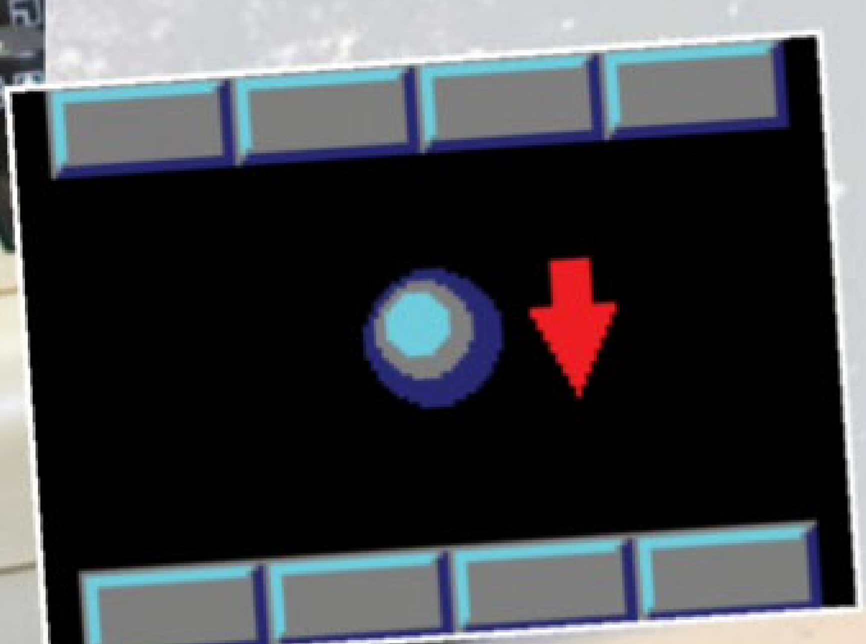

» [Amiga] Now what could this guy possibly want?

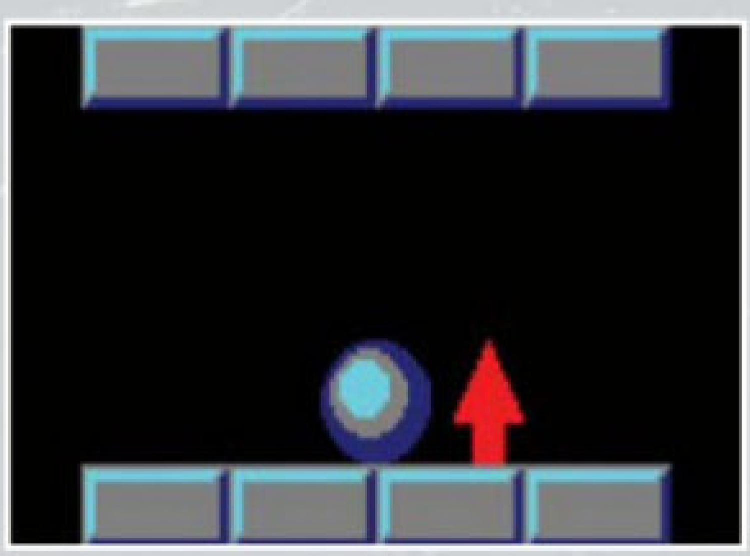

» [Amiga] How useful is an Atari ST?

Make this

Every month our very own Jason Kelk will be teaching you handy new programming techniques. This month: simple bouncing

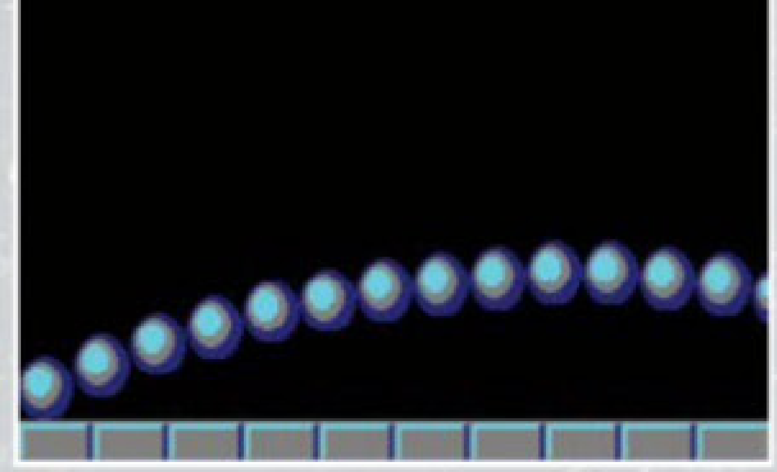
1 We'll start with a ball between two platforms; it has a variable for vertical speed but it's currently set to zero. After a number of game loops – four works quite well as an example – the speed is increased by one so the ball begins to accelerate downwards.

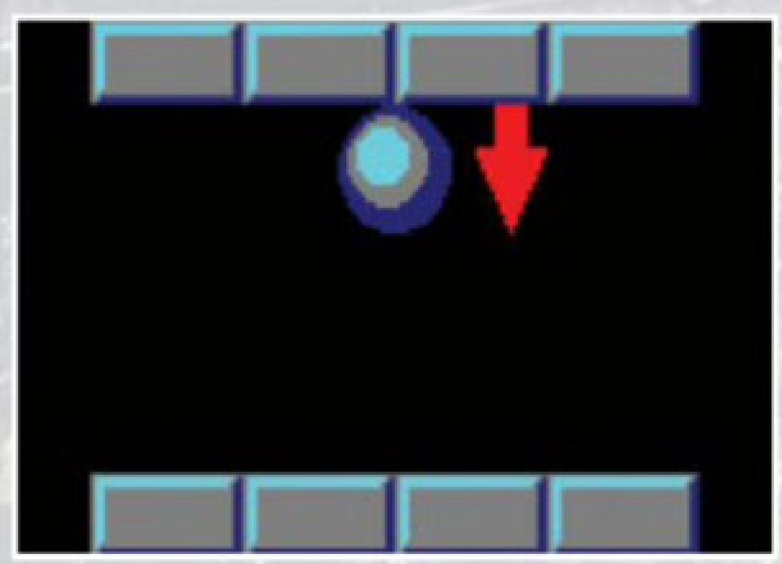




2 When the ball reaches a platform it needs to rebound off so the speed is changed to a negative number – for example minus four – and the ball can optionally be positioned so that it's 'sat' on the platform. On the next update the ball moves up.

3 Accelerating the ball downwards still works, except that it'll moving upwards and decelerates to a stop before heading down again. Sanity checks to ensure the ball isn't going too fast or to avoid triggering bounces when it's going up can be added.





4 Another option is to react to platforms above the object; this is a similar process so the object's top edge is lined up with the bottom of the platform, but the speed can either be zeroed or inverted depending on which effect is preferable.

STORMFINCH

» FORMAT: SINCLAIR SPECTRUM » DEVELOPER: STONECHAT PRODUCTIONS
» DOWNLOAD: KIKSTART.EU/STORMFINCH-SPEC » PRICE: FREE

You're not the saviour of mankind and, for the moment at least, the world doesn't actually need someone to save it anyway. However, you do like to spend some free time visiting new worlds aboard your spaceship and reducing alien life forms to their component molecules. That's fine, because the ones you'll face in *Stormfinch* have all been engineered to feel no pain so killing them is sort of okay, but they're not going to make it easy for you.

The Stormfinch itself is equiped a drone which can be positioned around it for covering fire, a 'pea shooter' which can chip away at enemies and a slow-charging but more powerful cannon. This game offers well-paced blasting action with quite a bit of variety to the waves and a ridiculous storyline, what more could shoot-'em-up fans want?

RetroGamer_Mag scored 8 for Stormfinch
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



» [ZX Spectrum] Open up your loving arms.

PUZCAT

» FORMAT: COMMODORE AMIGA » DEVELOPER: RS BEANBAG
» DOWNLOAD: KIKSTART.EU/PUZCAT-AMIGA » PRICE: FREE

As the name suggests, *PuzCat* is an action-flavoured puzzle game that stars a cat. Each stage is built from a series of screens and has a quota of mice to capture and there are also dogs roaming around which must be either avoided or disposed of using pushable blocks. Sometimes these blocks are also required in order to reach the higher platforms and they can even be used as a bridge to traverse spike pits.

A stage is completed when all of the mice are dealt with and PuzCat has reached the exit. There are bonus items to collect as well, some of which are squirreled away so it's worth properly exploring because doing so in even the very earliest screen of the game might lead to something interesting or indeed useful...



» [Amiga] Can't get me here!

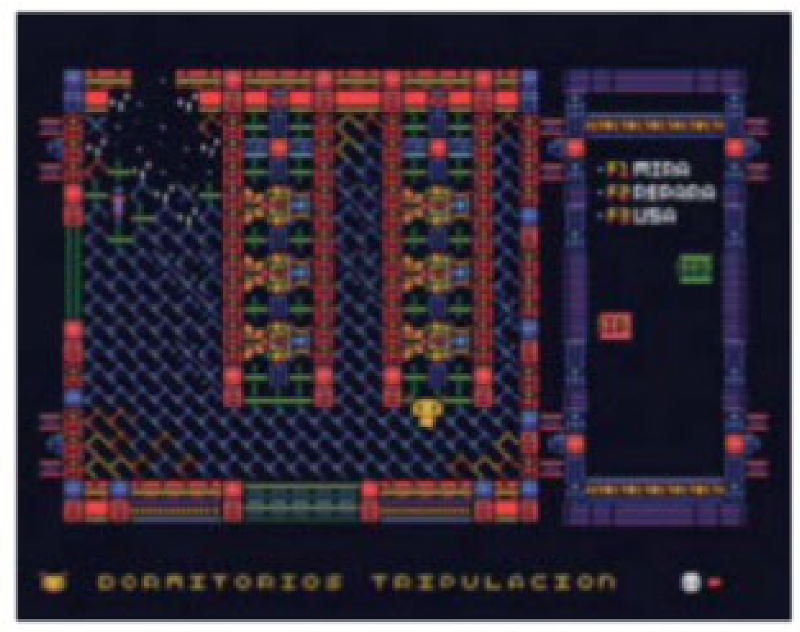
RetroGamer_Mag scored 7 for Puzcat
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

DRIBOL

» FORMAT: MSX 2 » DEVELOPER: ONIRIC FACTOR » DOWNLOAD: KIKSTART.EU/DRIBOL-MSX2 » PRICE: FREE

Dribol is the lone maintenance drone aboard a space freighter which has been seriously beaten up by a mid-galaxy collision that damaged most of its systems and has left the autopilot completely oblivious to the star directly in the ship's path. With the entire crew snoozing in suspended animation, Dribol is the only hope for survival and to save the day it must travel around the freighter, collecting ID cards to unlock doors and repairing systems while avoiding the spider-like invaders which are roaming around.

This is an unforgiving game with just one life, and several hazards are just waiting to take it away. *Dribol* is a reasonably presented game but it really can't be recommended for the majority of players out there; only service drones with significantly low blood pressure should apply for this job.



» [MSX 2] Wakey wakey, eggs and bakey.

RetroGamer_Mag scored 5 for Dribol
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE

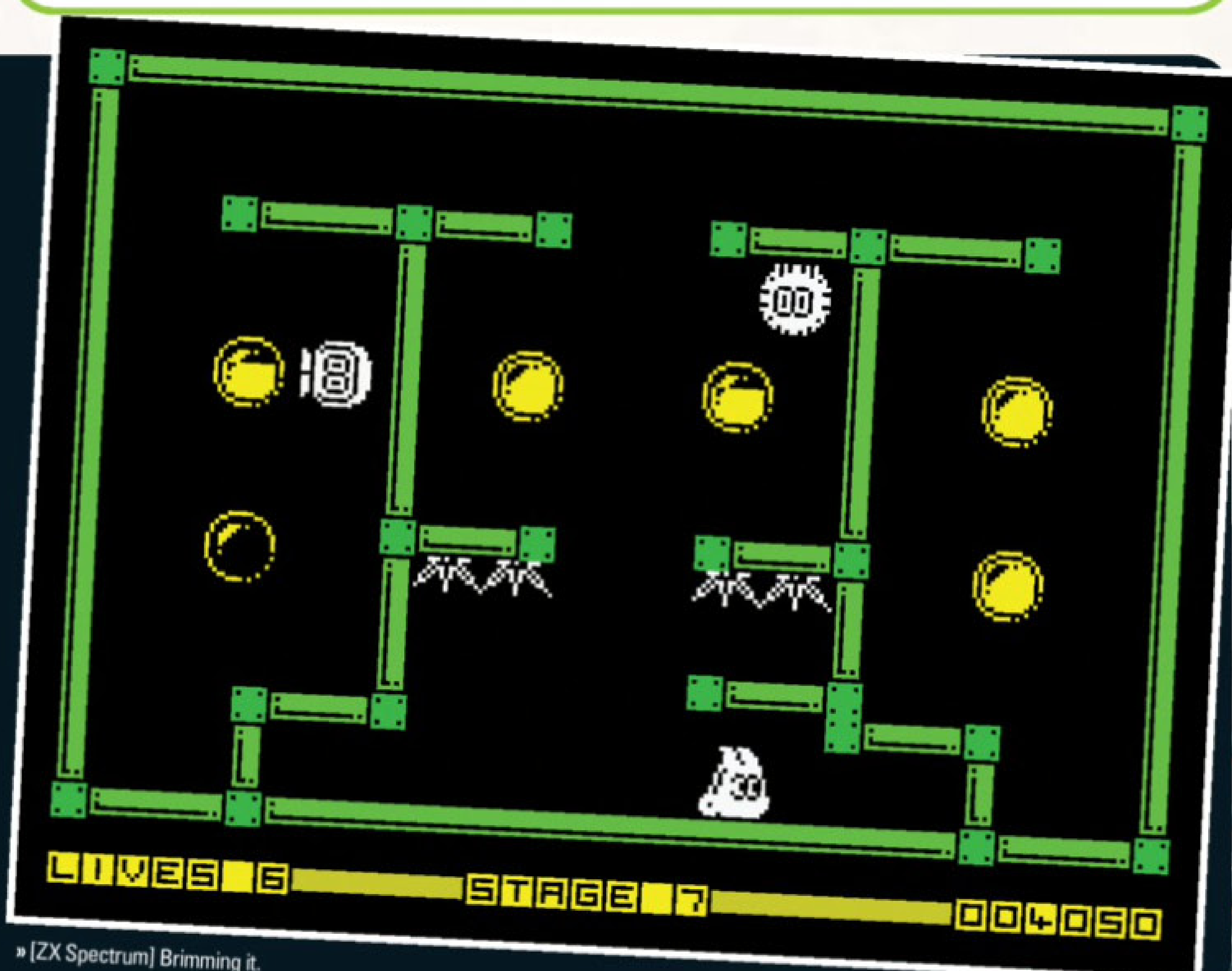
FLYPE

» FORMAT: ZX SPECTRUM » DEVELOPER: REPIXEL8
» DOWNLOAD: KIKSTART.EU/FLYPE-SPEC » PRICE: FREE

The world of *Flype* is an odd one where gravity isn't a constant, so it isn't unusual to see the locals walking up walls or across ceilings. The objective of each stage is to fill a quota of bubbles with liquid, which is achieved by jumping and bouncing off them from whatever is currently the floor. Players can't steer during a jump but there are objects which can influence their movement.

Each stage is a puzzle where the player must figure out where to stand in order to charge each bubble. Sometimes the best position isn't the safest because there are enemies to be wary of which are both fatal to the touch and able to drain bubbles should they get close enough. *Flype* is challenging when it gets going and will require some lateral thinking and fairly precise timing to clear the later stages.

RetroGamer_Mag scored 8 for Flype
Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE



» [ZX Spectrum] Brimming it.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one





» [Mega Drive] Here's *The Revenge Of Shinobi* on the Mega Drive. Looks like Sonny Chiba…



» [Wii] And here's the non-infringing version you'd play on the Wii. Such changes are surprisingly common, and require testing.

MARK'S BACK CATALOGUE BLUES

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I've been reading your magazine for around a year now, and while I definitely feel a bit 'middle child'-ish for some articles, I still think it's a really good read. In the last year I've come to one simple conclusion; that I am an idiot! I've been casually trading up to the next-gen consoles for 20 years, coming to a stop when I couldn't find good enough reasons to buy an Xbox One or PlayStation 4. This led me to backtrack and start picking up things I missed the first time round, which brings me to how difficult it's becoming to collect original games.

I've been very lucky with some of the finds I've picked up outside of eBay, to the point I think the iron in my blood formed into horseshoes on occasion, but the drought is setting in and I want to play. Is there a reason why companies won't make their full back-catalogue available for download with some emulators on current platforms? I still love finding an old original game, but some things are being treated like a licence to print money on the collector's circuit, or have just vanished without trace.

The tech is here, the audience is here, so why aren't the games here? There's a pretty big illegal emulator and ROM scene out there, they could be out of business and net the original organization a few quid along the way. Am I alone in this? There's potential millions waiting to be scooped for the gaming equivalent of an iTunes account…

Mark Coyne

There are reasons, and the biggest is that each old game is subject to the same production processes as a new one. At the very least a game needs to be rated by local classifications boards and tested for bugs, and if it's being released on a console, it will also have to pass the platform owner's approval process. While that might seem an unnecessary amount of work, alterations are occasionally made as a result – *Earthbound*'s Wii U release had attack effects toned down to avoid triggering epileptic seizures, while Sega had to produce a new revision of *The Revenge Of Shinobi* for Virtual Console due to an expired *Spider-Man* licence deal.

SHINING LIGHT

Hi **Retro Gamer**,

The news from this year's E3 that Sony was planning to help Yu Suzuki finance *Shenmue III* via Kickstarter blew my mind. If this is successful, would it be interesting for others to follow suit?

I'm a huge *Shining Force* fan, and the first thing I thought of was Nintendo and Camelot Software Planning doing something similar and trying to buy the *Shining Force* rights from Sega so that Camelot can program *Shining Force* games again?

There must be some way of contacting these companies just to let them know that people still want a *Shining Force* game and people still care, and to ask if something like this would even remotely be something they would consider a possibility.

STAR LETTER

21ST CENTURY RETRO

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I know this subject comes up *a lot*, but I was wondering if you could finally shut the lid on the question of 'what is retro?' I know it's quite subjective, but I had a discussion with a friend who's insisting to me that the original Xbox and the PS2 are not retro. My argument is that the PS2 is 15 years old, being released in 2000 and so put yourself in the year 2000 and go back 15 years from there. You'd be in 1985. Of course, in 2000 we were all saying the NES/Master System were retro consoles (and some were even calling the SNES/Mega Drive retro too) and those consoles weren't even 15 years old back then!

So what is his argument? What makes him say the PS2 isn't retro? Is it a simple case of him refusing to acknowledge he's getting older? I find it difficult to digest myself, but by that simple 15 year logic surely they are now retro? GameCube included?

What's *your* definition of it? For me I go by the two generation rule and so PS2, Xbox and Gamecube are now retro. I look forward to coverage of *Halo*, *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Luigi's Mansion* soon!

Dean Puckering



[GameCube] The likes of *Super Monkey Ball* would struggle to get retail releases today.

We'd typically use a 10 year rule, but the Xbox 360 has scuppered that. Right now two generations seems to work quite comfortably for us, but that doesn't mean you will see huge coverage of this generation in every issue, although we do have the readers' top 25 Xbox games this month! As technology moves on, we're getting a clearer picture of the historical impact of the PS2, Xbox and GameCube, and as the last generation without pervasive achievements, downloadable content and digital-only releases, the games certainly feel like they are from a different era.



DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Shenmue III

Nick declared that if *Shenmue III* was announced at E3, he would eat his hat. The next morning, he walked into the office having backed the Kickstarter. He claims that hats are passable when drenched in sauce, but given the look on his face afterwards, we have our doubts…

Don't forget to follow us online for all the latest retro updates

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Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

I know this is crazy, and it will never happen… but I have to at least try, right?

Steve Weber

If *Shenmue III* is successful it might certainly pave the way for similar projects, but while we've learned not to say that things are impossible we couldn't imagine Sega selling off the *Shining* rights at present. *Shenmue* was something that Sega hadn't used, outside of a couple of cameo appearances, since 2003. Conversely, Sega has been actively using the *Shining* name with new Japan-only sequels by Media Vision – and it's been very prolific in doing so, with four RPGs and a fighting spin-off in the last five years. The most recent, *Shining Resonance*, only came out in December 2014. Your dream might just have to wait in this case…

HELP HAS ARRIVED

Hello **Retro Gamer,**

I am sure this has already been answered but Martin's missing game is *Stratovox*.

Tony Redpath

» [Arcade] This guy has been captured and shouts "Help me!" – you've got to save him!



MORE HELP HAS ARRIVED!

Hi **RG,**

Great magazine. I have a subscription and even though I'm from Canada so the UK-specific content doesn't always elicit the same sense of nostalgia that is apparent in some of your contributors, I enjoy it and it's always worth the read.

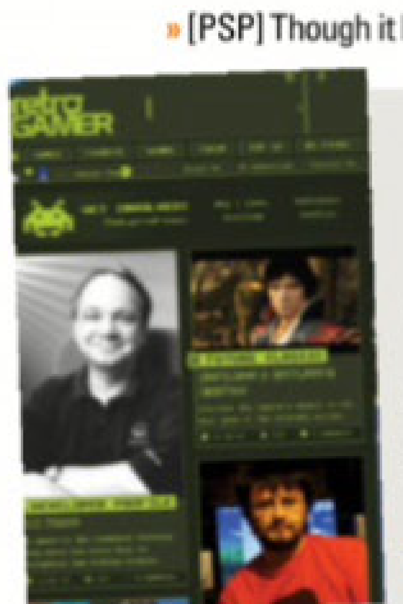
In your latest Mailbag, a reader (Martin) has asked about a certain game where people on the horizon yell "Save Me! Save Me!" when being captured by space ships. This sounds very much like Eighties *Stratovox* – the first game to feature voice synthesis, although they say "Help Me!" when captured, not "Save Me!

Brad Conrad

Many thanks to you both! Both emails arrived within a few hours of each other, and you were the only two readers to identify it, so a pat on the back is in order.



» [PSP] Though it hasn't been exporting them lately, Sega has constantly been cranking out games like *Shining Hearts*.



From the forum





» www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

Your 1942 Memories

ncf1
1942 was for me the next big thing for shmups after *Space Invaders* and *Galaga*. The playability for *1942* is absolutely perfect for a shooter, and has never been bettered; from the speed of the sprites to the difficulty level, it set the foundation for shooters to come on how to do it just right.

Mayhem
I always thought it odd that a Japanese company made a coin-op whereby you control an American plane destroying the entire Japanese air force on the way to Tokyo. Other than that, it's a hard game in general, but one that I like to fire up and have a blast with every so often.

NorthWay
Never saw the coin-op so I thought that C64 version was pretty ok. Seems that others disagree…

PostieDoc
The Spectrum version is great, easily one of my favourite shmups on the computer.

The Laird
My first memory of this was playing it on holiday at Butlins in Margate, loved it so much I bought the Speccy version as soon as I saw it!

Shinobi
Used to play this in about 2005 in Barry Island Copper Coin Arcade, sat on a stool with a cup of tea. Back in the day I could never get on it in the local arcade as there wasas always people playing it who were stupidly good and could one-credit the entire game.

ArchaicKoala
As shoot-'em-ups go, I've always found it a bit… plane! (Sorry!)

merman
I played it on the C64 first, but really enjoyed it the first time I saw it in the arcade. Of course that version doesn't have Mark Cooksey's excellent music.

Looking back, I think I would rather have had a smart bomb than the roll - it's a clever effect but it feels cumbersome.

felgekarp
An incredibly run of the mill shoot-'em-up, far surpassed by all of its sequels.

Darran@Retro Gamer
I remember watching Bullfrog's Alex Trowers play it at a game event once. He's amazing at it.

psj3809
Love the old retro graphics in this, the noise it makes when you do a spin or shoot. Never finished it but it's a game I just love playing.

retro GAMER

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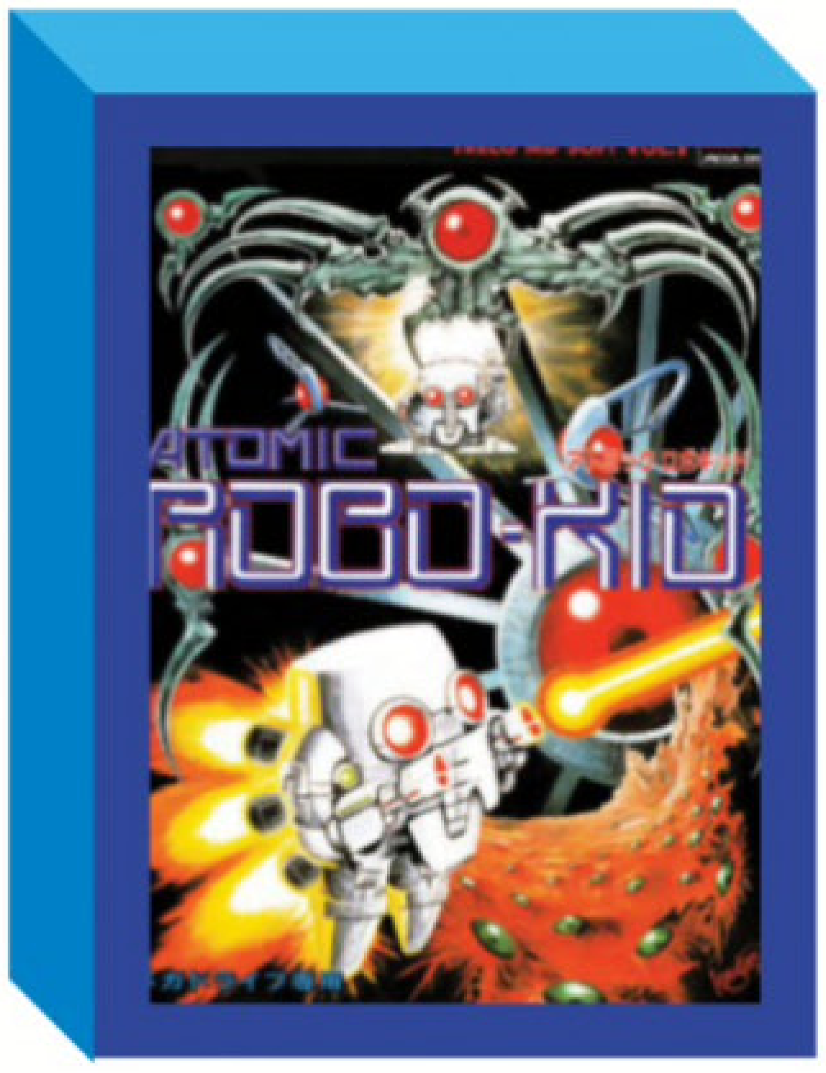

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ATOMIC ROBO-KID

» We feel sorry for the citizens of Terra-12. Despite living in the tech-savvy 21st century, Earth's deep space outpost has been bombarded with deadly cosmic radiation, which is destroying all remaining life. Looking for a saviour from the evil governors that now rule, the colonists turn to Robo-Kid, a bizarre little robot who looks like a cross between Dusty Bin and an elephant. Oh dear…



01

» It's all very well being a hero, but you certainly have to put up with plenty of crap. Take this final boss for example, who refuses to do the decent thing and die, requiring Robo-Kid to constantly fly around him in order to find a weak spot.



02

» With the boss defeated Robo-Kid comes across a woman and asks if she's the Biodroid Eve that's he's been tasked to save. You'd think that he'd be clued up enough to know a Biodroid when he sees one, but no, clearly not.



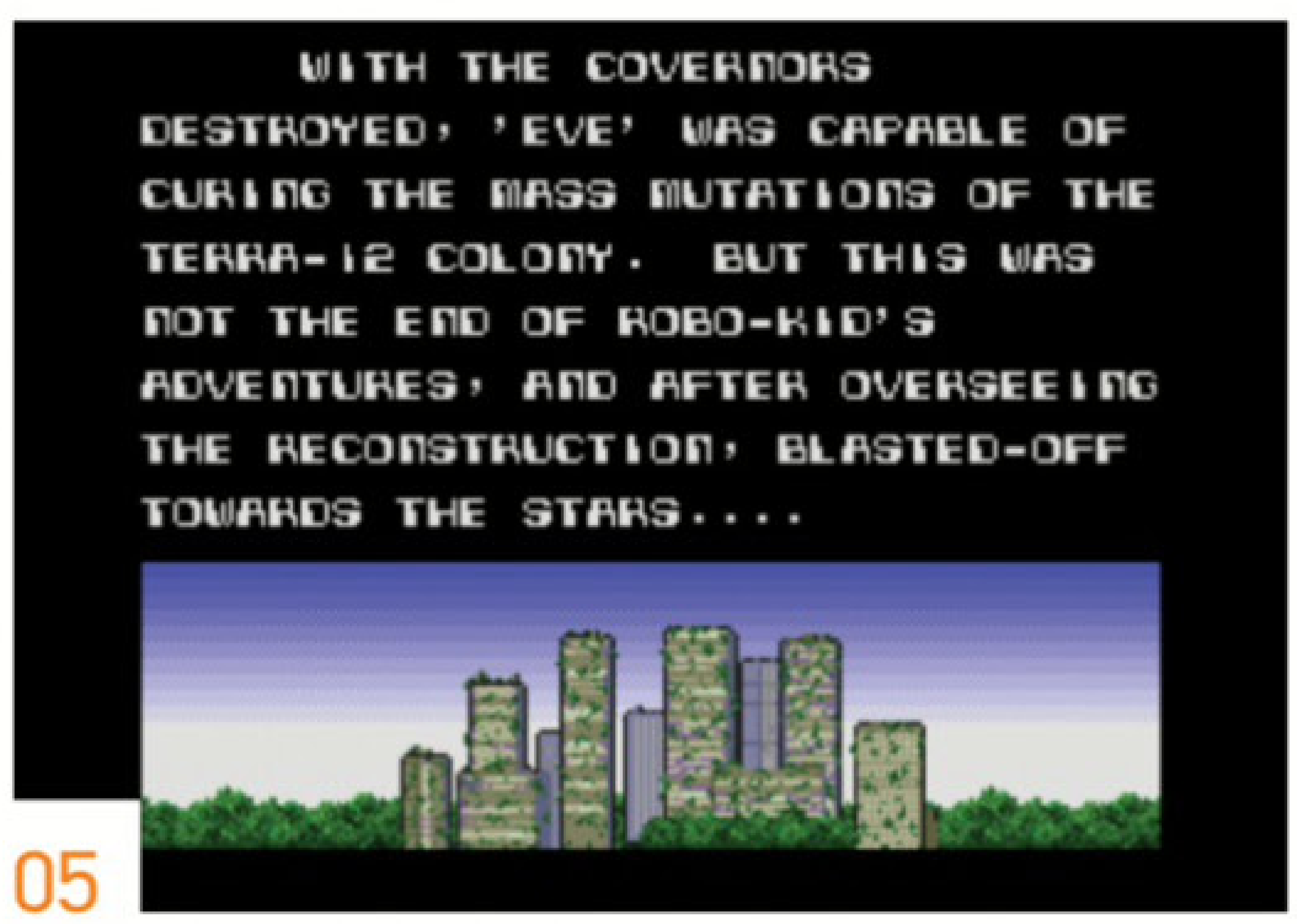
03

» Despite Robo-Kid's ignorance, Eve clearly knows a robotic creation that looks like a cross between Dusty Bin and an elephant when she sees one and asks how he is. The awkwardness of Robo-Kid's earlier ignorance is behind them.



04

» Eve is clearly relieved about being rescued and gives her saviour a fierce hug. She would certainly be less pleased if she knew that the only reason she's been revived is so she can be handed over to a new evil race so they can dissect her and infiltrate another distant planet.



05

» With Eve rescued we're treated to a now saved Terra-12 and a little coda explaining that everything will be fine and Robo-Kid is going off on further adventures. Sadly, those adventures never arrived, meaning we'll never know the fate of the odd looking robot who looked a little bit like Dusty Bin.

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